

A History of India

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In Two Books

BOOK

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Preface

India is a cradle of human civilisation. Its culture is closely linked with that of many other peoples and has exerted a significant influence upon their development. Despite centuries of this mutual enrichment India has maintained its original and striking individuality. The achievements of ancient and medieval India in science, literature and art over thousands of years have inspired the creative thought of nations far and wide. Hinduism and Buddhism, that originated in India, and other religious and philosophical teachings which evolved on this foundation, were to influence not merely the development of many Eastern civilisations, but also social thought in many other parts of the world.

Despite colonial oppression, which lasted for close on two hundred years, the people of India succeeded in upholding the traditions of their cultural heritage, distinguished in particular by the lofty ideals of humanism and a profound love of peace. In more recent times the culture and science of contemporary India have been developing on the basis of an original synthesis of Indian cultural traditions and the democratic principles of European culture.

The outstanding Indian writer, musician and teacher Rabindranath Tagore was and is held dear by the whole of the human race.

The history of India in the last several hundred years is that of a long and heroic struggle waged by several generations in the name of liberation from colonial and feudal oppression. The names of outstanding thinkers and politicians who headed the triumphant advance of the national revolution—Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—stand out in the ranks of those who fought for India's freedom.

India's emergence as an independent nation in 1947 marked a new era in the history of its people. The country was then faced by a task of historic proportions: it had to overcome the survivals of its colonial past and choose a path leading into the future. The historical evolution of modern India is for the most part characterised by steady economic, social, political and cultural progress that is paving the way for profound change in the destiny of this great country.

Scientific analysis of the history and culture of India began at the end of the 18th century, when Europe once again "discovered" India. Since then a variety of schools and trends have grown up in Indology. Many works on India written by West European scholars are too Europe-orientated and various chapters of Indian history are approached in the same way as phenomena of European culture or ancient civilisations closer and more familiar to Europe.

In India itself great interest was shown in the study of the country's history and culture at the turn of the century, as the movement for national independence gained ground. Indian scholars made tremendous strides in the study of their country's history at this time, subjecting to scientific analysis many interesting works of literature and historical source materials. It was they who for the first time presented the history of modern India as the history of a struggle for independence.

An important contribution to this work was made by Russian Indologists. Prominent among them were I. Minayev, F. Shcherbatskoy, and S. Oldenburg, whose works constitute examples of outstanding scholarship. The Indologists of the Russian school have always shown deep respect for the cultural heritage of the peoples of India, and adopted an objective, strictly scientific approach to their study of the country's history and culture.

After the October Revolution of 1917 a Marxist school of Indology grew up: prominent scholars at the early stages included I. Reisner, V. Balabushevich, A. Dyakov, A. Osipov and N. Goldberg.

The interest shown in India grows from year to year in the Soviet Union. This can be accounted for both by the role which India played and continues to play in the world's historical development, and also by the broad political, economic and cultural ties which have grown up between the USSR and India. A deep affection for the peoples of India and a sense of international solidarity lead Soviet men and women to acquaint themselves in detail with India past and present. In the last ten years alone a large number of academic and general works on India's history and culture have appeared and many works by Indian writers have been translated into Russian.

Soviet historians compiled and published a four-volume *History of India* in 1959-1969 which was well received in the country concerned. This work, some of whose authors and editors have contributed to the present study as well, has been drawn on for this new *History of India* in two books. At the same time use has also been made of the latest research into Indian history carried out by scholars from both the Soviet Union and many other countries.

It is hoped that this book will provide the reader with a deeper knowledge of India and the history and culture of its peoples, and thus promote friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union.

The authors of this work are as follows: G. Bongard-Levin (Part I), K. Antonova (Part II and Part III as far as the section entitled "India during the Transition to Imperialism") and G. Kotovsky (the remainder of Part III and Part IV).

The Rise of Magadha

The political history of Northern India in the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C. abounds in colourful events. It was the period when the first large states took shape, gained strength and then contended for supremacy.

Written sources make it clear that numerous wars and military armed clashes took place between the states, not to mention dynastic feuds and struggles between monarchies and republican unions.

Evidence of early Buddhist sources make possible the assertion that there existed sixteen *mahajanapadas* (or "great lands") in Northern India in the middle of the sixth century B.C. This did not, however, cover all the states of Northern India. In reality their number was far above that estimate. The number sixteen would only have covered the largest and most powerful among them.

It is revealing to note that it became the accepted tradition in India to place fourteen of the sixteen "great lands" in the "Middle Land", which reflects the all-important role of the Ganges valley states in the political geography of India in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. This also points to the more rapid development of statehood in that part of India.

The dominant force in the political arena of Northern India at that time, the centre around which the North Indian states rallied, was Magadha. This name is first mentioned in the *Atharva Veda*, later it appears in a wide variety of ancient Indian sources.

The ancient state of Magadha (situated in what is now Southern Bihar) occupied an extremely advantageous geographical position that gave it great strategic and commercial potential. Written sources contain references to the fertility of the soil of Magadha, which was the object of painstaking cultivation. The state carried on lively trade with many parts of India, and was richly endowed with minerals, including metals. The ancient capital was Rajagriha (the Pali name for it was Rajagaha, and it is now known as Rajgir).

Little is known of Magadha's dynastic history. There are certain historical references to the founder of the Haryanka dynasty, Bimbisara (545/544-493 B.C.), who according to Buddhist writings subjugated the neighbouring state of Anga. This strengthened Magadha's position and laid the foundations for its expansionist policies. In historical sources references are also found to the links between Magadha and the states of Western and Northern India.

Bimbisara devoted a good deal of attention to the internal consolidation of his state, introducing strict control over the activities of his state officials. Under Bimbisara's son, Ajatashatru (493-461 B.C.), fierce hostilities were waged against Prasenajit (Pali name—

Pasenadi), ruler of Koshala, one of the most powerful states in the Ganges valley. After long rivalry Magadha finally emerged victorious.

Another desperate struggle was that against the republican alliance of the Lichchhavis who lived to the north of Magadha. This clash was brought about by the Lichchhavis' seizure of a port on the river Ganges, which Magadha was also anxious to secure. While waiting for the Lichchhavis to attack, King Ajatashatru gave orders for the building of a special fortress, Pataligrama. He also resorted to cunning and sent into the Lichchhavis' capital Vaishali one of his state officials who succeeded in disuniting the enemy's camp. To judge by a number of sources the war between Magadha and the Lichchhavis lasted for sixteen years; once again it was Magadha that was to emerge victorious.

Jaina texts reveal that King Ajatashatru used siege catapults and owed his success to them.

Another major rival of Magadha was the powerful state of Avanti in Western India.

The struggle waged by Magadha's main rivals—Koshala, Avanti and the Lichchhavi alliance was a contest not only for political but also for economic supremacy. For this reason great importance was always attached to control over the Ganges river system, which provided a crucial trade route.

In order to consolidate Magadha's power Ajatashatru's son Udayin (461-445 B.C.) transferred the capital from Rajagriha to Pataliputra that became a major centre in ancient India. The power of the state of Avanti was undermined at a later date, in the time of King Shishunaga, who came from a new line, the Shaishunaga dynasty. This dynasty later gave way to the Nanda dynasty, under whom a large empire was established. Knowledge of the dynasties' chronology is far from complete, and the dates accepted by scholars are only pointers. Scholars of this period base themselves for the main part on data to be found in later Ceylonese chronicles (the *Dipavamsa* of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. and the *Mahavamsa* of the sixth century A.D.) and also in the *Puranas* compiled in the early medieval period. The following dates are regarded as the most acceptable: the Haryanka dynasty founded by Bimbisara (437-413 B.C.), the Shaishunaga dynasty (413-345 B.C.) and the Nanda dynasty (345-317/314 B.C.).

The Achaemenid Empire and the Indian Campaign of Alexander of Macedon

A very different situation was to be found in North-Western India, where there was no large state capable of uniting surrounding tribes and peoples, as was the case in the Ganges valley. This area was

peopled by tribes of various ethnic origin, of a wide variety of languages and cultures. The strongest states were Kamboja and Gandhara which numbered among the sixteen "great lands".

At the end of the sixth century B.C. some regions of North-Western India formed part of the Achaemenid empire.

In rock inscriptions of the famous Achaemenid emperor, Darius (522-486 B.C.), Gandhara and the trans-Indus region are named among his satrapies. The latter evidently incorporated areas in the central and lower reaches of the Indus River, but may have included neighbouring territories as well. Herodotus has left us an interesting reference to an expedition undertaken by Scylax of Caryanda at the command of Darius with the aim of ascertaining "the spot where the Indus River enters the sea". This expedition was important from both a strategic and scientific point of view. It enabled the Persians to acquaint themselves more closely with the population of the Indian regions, with their customs and traditions.

Only a part of North-Western India was incorporated into the Achaemenid empire, yet these territories and certain other parts of the country were subjected to a certain degree of cultural and political influence of Achaemenid Persia.

By way of its western territories India was to come into contact with the states of the Near East and Central Asia, parts of which had also been incorporated into the Achaemenid empire. The official language of that empire's records was Aramaic, which was used in that part of the world later on too.

While a good deal was known in the West about those areas of India which formed part of the Achaemenid empire, classical writers of that period knew practically nothing about Eastern India and the political events that were taking place in the valley of the Ganges. According to Herodotus that part of the country was mere desert. India's ties with states of the West, and this also applies to the eastern provinces of the country, changed considerably after the campaign of Alexander of Macedon.

Alexander marched into Indian territory at the height of his fame, after securing major military victories. His enormous and well-equipped army seemed assured of further successes. Moreover North-Western India was divided between mutually hostile alliances of tribes; between the rulers of the small state alliances there was no unity. Some of the petty kings in the area (such as the ruler of Taxila) allied themselves with Alexander. In return for this Alexander promised them a certain degree of autonomy and allowed them to retain their former possessions. However from the very beginning of the Indian campaign Alexander was to encounter fierce resistance from many tribes. The chroniclers of the campaign, who endeavoured to extol Alexander's feats and successes, could not fail to remark on the amazing persistence displayed by the Indians, their bravery and passionate desire to fight to the bitter end. Many Indian tribes refused

outright to negotiate with the Greeks and Macedonians and threw themselves into the unequal struggle: indeed on a good number of occasions they were even to emerge victorious.

The strongest of the Indian rulers in North-Western India was King Porus, one of those who resolved to face up to Alexander in open battle. This battle, which lasted several days, took place on the banks of the Hydaspes (the River Jhelum). The scale of the battle can be deduced from the figures cited by Arrian in his *Anabasis of Alexander* (A History of Alexander's Campaign). Arrian informs us that in the last decisive battle thirty thousand foot soldiers and four thousand cavalry took part, that three hundred chariots and two hundred elephants were used. Only by resorting to a cunning manoeuvre was Alexander able to break through Porus' ranks. His lightly armed cavalry sowed panic among the well-armed but slow-moving Indian forces. Alexander emerged victorious from this encounter but King Porus fought to the last, despite his serious wounds. The courage of the Indian king won over Alexander, and he not only spared Porus' life but even allowed him to retain his possessions.

Alexander's army then moved further eastwards as far as Hydroates (modern Ravi). Alexander started rallying his forces to cross the river Hyphasis (modern Beas). Yet first he decided to find out all he could about the country beyond the Hyphasis, about its ruler and its army. Local petty rulers told Alexander of the land's wealth, and of the strong army led by an Indian chieftain named Agrammes. By that time discontent was making itself felt among Alexander's own troops, many of whom were demanding the cessation of this exhausting campaign. Reluctantly Alexander at last agreed to abandon his dream and gave the order to withdraw. The retreat of the Greco-Macedonian troops coincided with a new wave of anti-Macedonian uprisings and disturbances. They met with particularly stiff resistance from the Mallas, who had a strong army and were well organised.

On leaving India Alexander left behind him the division into satrapies with his experienced commanders and a number of local Indian rulers in charge. Alexander had only succeeded in subjugating part of North-Western India and in Indian sources there is no mention of Alexander's campaign, nor of the resistance to his army (this information was handed down to us by classical authors). Nevertheless influence of the campaign on the events of that period of Indian history cannot be dismissed out of hand.

Alexander's campaign showed that one of the main reasons for the Indians' defeat was the lack of unity, the internal feuds. Their struggle against foreign invaders obliged the local kings to join forces.

The campaign also led to a considerable extension and consolidation of cultural and trade links between India and the outside world. India itself began to exert an increasing influence on the Hellenistic world.

The State of the Nandas

At the time of Alexander's campaign it was the Nanda dynasty that was ruling in Pataliputra. Local petty kings told Alexander of the strength of the Nanda troops, of the unpopularity of King Agrammes. This can be gleaned from the works of classical writers, although much of the information relating to the Nanda empire has come down to us mainly from local Indian sources.

According to Indian tradition the Nanda rulers were regarded as a *shudra* dynasty that had supposedly wiped out all the *kshatriyas*, and the first of the Nanda rulers was the son of a *shudra* mother and of unknown descent. This explains why Brahman sources and dynastic chronicles (the *Puranas*) list the Nandas as "men of mean virtue and mean birth". This description was also to be found in the writings of classical writers, who would, it appears, have been familiar with Indian tradition. Some data give us reason to assume that classical writers were acquainted with Indian legends about the first Mauryan king Chandragupta, and his minister Chanakya. This cycle of legends also contains references to the predecessors of the Mauryans—the kings of the Nanda dynasty.

References in local and classical sources coincide when it comes to descriptions of the Nandas' enormous army. Diodorus and Quintus Curtius Rufus list the following figures pertaining to the Nanda army under Agrammes: 200,000 foot soldiers, 20,000 cavalry, 2,000 chariots and between three and four thousand elephants. In some Indian and Ceylonese texts the first Nanda king is given the name of Ugrasena, which means "having an enormous army".

Another characteristic traditionally attributed to the Nandas is their urge to accumulate wealth; the Ceylonese texts reveal that the Nandas made all manner of possessions subject to tax including leather, wood and precious stones.

Making good use of their strong army and methodical system for the collection of taxes, the Nanda rulers were extremely active in the field of foreign policy. They succeeded in breaking the power and independence of certain local dynasties and penetrating regions of the Deccan further to the south. Epigraphic sources make it clear that the state of Kalinga (now Orissa) or some of it was part of the Nanda empire.

The empire which resulted from these endeavours of the Nanda rulers laid the foundation for the organisation of a united Indian state under the Mauryan dynasty which was to follow.

The Emergence of the Mauryan Empire. Chandragupta and Bindusara

The first king of the Mauryan dynasty was Chandragupta. However before Chandragupta achieved this eminence he had to wage a fierce

struggle against the Nandas, and also against the Greek garrisons left in India by Alexander. In Indian and classical sources there are many interesting references to the various stages of the struggle waged by Chandragupta to gain power, although the chronology of the chapters in that struggle is still a subject of great controversy among the historians.

Different theories are put forward with regard to the origins of the Mauryans. Some link them to the Nandas and hold that Chandragupta was one of the sons of the Nanda king. However in most sources (Buddhist and Jaina ones) the Mauryans are represented as a *kshatriya* clan from Magadha.

Buddhist and Jaina tradition tells of Chandragupta's early years, his study in Taxila, where he is thought to have met his mentor and future adviser Kautilya (or Chanakya). It is difficult to say how far these data can be relied on. Tradition asserts that Chandragupta, together with Chanakya, elaborated a plan in Taxila for seizing the throne of Magadha. It is interesting to note that the clash between the young Chandragupta and the Nandas is also recorded by the Roman writer, Justinus (second century A.D.) who drew on the materials to be found in the works of Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus, a writer in the age of Emperor Augustus, who in his turn probably drew on the cycle of Chandragupta legends.

From Ceylonese chronicles it emerges that Chanakya started mustering forces together with Chandragupta: warriors were hired in a number of regions, and soon an enormous army led by Chandragupta had come into being.

The Greek writer Plutarch (46-126 A.D.) even has a reference to a meeting between the young Chandragupta and Alexander. This meeting, even if it really did take place, could have taken place after the first confrontation between Chandragupta and the Nanda king. According to Plutarch, Chandragupta had a very low opinion of the Nanda king Agrammes and was inclined to support Alexander, urging the latter to move his army eastwards against the Indian king who was universally despised. However Alexander did not, as we know, undertake a campaign into the heart of India, and was obliged to return west whence he had come.

Buddhist and Jaina sources tell that Chandragupta's first attempt to overthrow the Nandas was unsuccessful, since he did not secure his rear. At that period Chandragupta could naturally not embark on an offensive against the strong army of the Greeks and Macedonians as well. After Alexander's main troops had left India conditions played into Chandragupta's hands.

Alexander divided the territory he had conquered into satrapies, leaving part of the lands to Indian rulers too. Soon afterwards rebellions broke out against Macedonian rule and a power struggle between the satrapies began that became particularly intense after the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. Chandragupta, then in the Punjab,

was clearly ready to launch a strife against the remaining Macedonian garrisons, by now only shadows of their former selves. When the last satrap Eudemos was obliged to leave India in 317 B. C., Chandragupta had become the virtual ruler of the Punjab. At the same time one of his main rivals was killed—the mighty Indian king Porus, who ruled over large territories that had been given him by Alexander. Attention now focussed on the vital seizure of the throne of Magadha, and Chandragupta, after making sure of the support of a number of republican unions from North-Western India, moved his army against the Nandas.

Thus the war against the Greco-Macedonian troops can be seen as one of the stages in Chandragupta's struggle for power, for the throne at Pataliputra. The freeing of Indian territories from foreign troops was an important step, yet even writers of ancient Greece and Rome inform us that after his victory Chandragupta forfeited the name of liberator, turning India into a slave-camp: after securing power he subjected his peoples to oppression, those same peoples which he had freed from foreign domination (Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus cited by Junianus Justinus).

The struggle against the Nandas was an extremely stubborn one. The Nanda kings had an enormous army and in the decisive battle a million soldiers, ten thousand elephants, a hundred thousand horses and five thousand charioteers perished, according to the Buddhist text *Milinda-panha* (these figures are of course highly exaggerated but the legend of a grim, bloody battle lives on).

Chandragupta's coronation took place in 317 B.C. This date coincides with data from Indian (Buddhist and Jaina) and classical sources, although many historians date the Mauryan dynasty from later times.

From classical sources we learn of the confrontation between Chandragupta and Seleucus Nikator—a former comrade-in-arms of Alexander and later the king of Syria—and of the peace concluded between them. No indication is provided in these sources as to the reasons for the hostilities breaking out. We can merely assume that Chandragupta, after consolidating his newly gained power, turned to his own advantage the struggle for supremacy going on between Alexander's heirs and the diadochi, and attacked Seleucus. He was anxious to win back those regions which Alexander had seized and which had fallen to Seleucus after Alexander's death. In the peace treaty concluded after the hostilities Chandragupta gave Seleucus 500 elephants, while the Mauryans gained Paropamisus, Arachosia, and Gedrosia.

Seleucus sent his ambassador, Megasthenes, to Chandragupta's court; Megasthenes described his sojourn in a special work entitled *Indika* (of which only fragments have been preserved).

After Chandragupta, who ruled for 24 years (probably from 317 to 293 B. C.), the throne of Magadha went to his son Bindusara, known

to the Greeks as Amitrochates (Sanskrit: Amitraghata—“the slayer of his foes”). This title reflected, it appears, the tense situation obtaining in the country at that period. Uprisings were rife in a number of areas and some evidence would indicate that during Bindusara's reign a number of territories in the Deccan were captured, although no epigraphic finds relating to this period have been made.

Bindusara, like his father, maintained close diplomatic ties with Hellenistic Egypt and the Seleucid empire. Strabo writes that a Seleucid ambassador by the name of Deimachos was sent to Pataliputra. Athenaios writes of interesting facts in connection with the exchange of messages between the Seleucid king Antiochus and the Indian king Bindusara. The Indian king asked Antiochus to send him sweet wine, dried figs and a Sophist philosopher. Bindusara was promised only wine and figs, for Antiochus was not allowed to sell any Sophists.

If we are to believe the *Puranas* Bindusara reigned for 25 years (293-268 B.C.). After his death there was long and bitter rivalry between his sons for power. Eventually Ashoka came to the throne in Pataliputra.

THE MAURYAN EMPIRE DURING THE REIGN OF ASHOKA

Piyadasi-Ashoka

Under Ashoka the Mauryan state achieved the zenith of its power. The territory of the empire was extended and it became one of the largest in the ancient East. Its fame spread far beyond the confines of India. Legends grew up around Ashoka and his activities in which special emphasis was laid on his feats in connection with the propagation of Buddhism. These Buddhist legends came to be well known in many countries of Asia.

The many edicts issued by Ashoka provide important information about the history of this period, the way in which the empire was administered, and about the policies of the Mauryans. In the edicts the Mauryan king is referred to as Devanampiya Piyadasi, which means “King Piyadasi, dear to the gods”. Only in two edicts is the king given the name Ashoka. Some later sources revealed that Piyadasi was the actual name of Bindusara's son before he seized the throne; then, after becoming king, he was also known as Ashoka (literally—“bereft of sadness”).

In the Greek versions of his edicts found in Kandahar, the Mauryan king is referred to as Piyadasi. The Ceylonese chronicles tell how Piyadasi, when still only the heir to the throne, was sent by his father, King Bindusara, to rule in Western India (to the province of Avanti) with its centre in Ujjayani (Ujjain). According to North Indian sources the king's son was in North-Western India in the town of Taxila, where Bindusara had sent him to put down an uprising

among the local inhabitants against the king's officials. These sources also tell of Piyadasi's fierce struggle against his brothers to assert power. The chronicles from Ceylon relate that this rivalry continued even after Ashoka had seized the throne of Magadha. This explained why Ashoka's official coronation took place only four years after he came to power.

The War Against Kalinga

The only major political event mentioned in the edicts of King Ashoka was the war against Kalinga, a powerful state on the western shore of the Bay of Bengal (modern Orissa). In the edict concerned King Ashoka declares that during that war 150,000 prisoners were taken and more than 100,000 men were killed. The annexation of Kalinga, important from both a strategic and commercial point of view, helped to consolidate the empire.

Kalinga put up a determined resistance to King Ashoka. This region had been part of the Nanda empire previously, and then succeeded in achieving independence. In a special edict dedicated to the conquest of Kalinga Ashoka himself acknowledged that stern measures of punishment had been used against both the common people and the nobility which had also been reluctant to reconcile itself to the power of the Mauryans. Ashoka was even obliged to introduce special measures in order to reduce tension in the newly conquered territories. Kalinga was granted a large degree of independence, however the emperor kept a personal check on the activities of his officials there, making sure that citizens were not imprisoned without due cause and that no suffering was instigated without good purpose.

Many historians consider that the war against Kalinga forced Ashoka to abandon his traditional active foreign policy, aimed at setting up a united state. As they see it, the emperor had by this time become a dreamer, no longer striving after extension and consolidation of his influence and power. However these views do not coincide with the data provided in source materials. Ashoka did not relinquish his active foreign policy, he merely changed his methods to some degree. Without forgetting his power and using force where necessary, the Mauryan ruler employed in the main ideological and diplomatic weapons. Relying on specially appointed officials and on diplomatic missions he went out of his way to consolidate his influence in territories not yet conquered, promising their inhabitants the emperor's affection and good care, fatherly concern and all manner of support.

In one of his edicts Ashoka issued the following instructions to his officials: "The people of unconquered lands must become firmly convinced that in our eyes the King is like a father. He feels towards

his people what he would feel towards himself, they are dear to him as his children.”

Ashoka maintained close diplomatic relations with many countries. In his edicts there is mention of the Seleucid king, Antiochus II Theos (grandson of Seleucus); Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Egypt; King Antigonos Gonatus of Macedon; King Magas of Cyrene and King Alexander of Epirus. Mauryan envoys or *dutas* were sent to various countries where they told of their powerful and upright King Ashoka.

Particularly close ties were maintained with Ceylon, where Ashoka sent a special mission headed by his son Mahinda (Mahendra) to propagate Buddhism.

The then king of Ceylon, Tissa, in gratitude for this, assumed in Ashoka's honour his title Devanampiya (Dear to the Gods), and sent an ambassador to Pataliputra.

Chronology

The dates of Ashoka's reign are still subject of great controversy among historians, although his inscriptions contain important information bearing on this question. In the so-called Major Rock Edicts made twelve years after Ashoka's coronation simultaneous mention is made of five Hellenistic rulers, which means that in the year the edict was made all five kings were still alive. This could have meant 256 or 255 B.C. This would imply that Ashoka's reign began in approximately 268 B.C.

Interesting research has been carried out with regard to astronomical data contained in the legends of Ashoka. In Buddhist legends we read of an eclipse of the Sun—an event which seems to have coincided in time with the journey Ashoka undertook to visit certain Buddhist shrines. Scholars have ascertained that in 249 B.C., during Ashoka's reign, a solar eclipse actually took place. In one of the king's edicts issued during the twentieth year of his reign there is reference to his visit to Buddha's birthplace. All this when taken together gives us reason to assume that Ashoka's reign began in 268 B.C. Certain other source materials confirm this date: if Bindusara reigned for twenty-five years, as is stated in the *Puranas*, which contain dynastic lists, then the year 268 B.C. is the year of Ashoka's accession. Buddhist tradition has mention of the fact that the coronation of Ashoka took place 218 years after Buddha's death, which as many scholars agree might have taken place in the year 486 B.C. If one follows this tradition, we shall have the very same date for the beginning of Ashoka's reign—268 B.C.

Some scholars, it should be pointed out, favour other dates, and often refer to the mention in the Ceylonese chronicles that Ashoka was not crowned immediately after taking power, but only four years

later. On this basis they date Ashoka's accession to the year 265 B.C. The question as to the chronology of the Mauryan empire remains highly complex.

The Extent of the Mauryan Empire

The Mauryan empire covered enormous territories. This single state formation embraced peoples and tribes of different ethnic origins, languages and cultures, who followed different usages, traditions and religious beliefs.

To judge by Ashoka's inscriptions and also by the *Arthashastra*, by this period there had already been established the idea of a large state headed by the ruler of the land, whose power stretched over enormous regions—from the southern ocean to the Himalayas. The authors of the political treatises had already elaborated in detail their theory with regard to the extent of the empire and its relations with other nations near and far.

The appearance of new ideas in the Mauryan period is reflected in various descriptions of King Bimbisara of Magadha and Emperor Ashoka. The former was referred to as the "*pradesha king*", i. e., king of a small territory or province, while Ashoka was regarded as the "omnipotent ruler of Jambudvipa", i. e., the whole of India.

It is the edicts of the emperor that provide the main evidence with regard to the extent of the Mauryan empire. Some information is also to be gleaned from classical authors writing of the age of Chandragupta. Information provided by Chinese travellers also has some value, particularly when it is borne out by epigraphic or archeological evidence.

Definition of the western borders of the empire has been greatly facilitated by the discovery in Kandahar—the centre of Arachosia—of the edicts of Ashoka (Greek and Greco-Aramaic inscriptions), which clearly points to the fact that Arachosia (now an area of modern Afghanistan) was part of his empire.

In Ashoka's edicts there are several references to the Yonas and Kambojas as peoples living in the west of the country.

The word Yonas is used to refer to Greeks, whose settlements were to be found in Arachosia. It was for the Greek population that versions of Ashoka's edicts were prepared in Greek. Some scholars hold that the Yonas in Ashoka's day were descendants of those Greek tribes which had settled in Arachosia at the time of Alexander of Macedon.

In Arachosia there also lived the Kambojas (an Iranian-language tribe), mentioned in ancient Indian legends as splendid horsemen and horse-breeders. The language of the Kambojas is hardly known, but because in the Aramaic version of Ashoka's edict from Kandahar we find many Iranian words, there is reason to believe that this version had been intended for the Kambojas.

An edict of Ashoka's was also found in Lampaka (near modern Jelalabad) which confirmed that Paropamisus actually was part of the Mauryan empire (this had only been gleaned before that from Greek sources telling of the results of the armistice between Chandragupta and Seleucus).

Data found in the Kashmir chronicle *Rajatarangini* and in descriptions by Chinese pilgrims give us reason to believe that part of Kashmir was also incorporated into Ashoka's empire. Tradition asserts that Shrinagar, the main city of Kashmir, was built in the reign of Ashoka. Some parts of Nepal also may have been within the confines of his empire. Epigraphic findings and written sources also indicate that Bengal was part of the empire.

When edicts issued by Ashoka were found in Southern India this facilitated the establishment of the empire's southern borders. It ran approximately south of the modern Chitaldrug district. In the south this empire bordered with the states of the Cholas, Keralaputras and Satyaputras, mentioned in Ashoka's edicts as territories outside his state. However the Mauryans maintained close contacts with these regions. Buddhist *stupas* were built there, and teachers were sent as well. Diplomatic links were also maintained with many other countries, including the Hellenistic countries to the west of India, with Sri Lanka and certain regions of Central Asia.

Royal Power in the Mauryan Age

During the time of the Magadha kingdom and under the Mauryan rulers, monarchical power had been consolidated and the role of tribal institutions had gradually decreased in importance.

It was in the age of the Mauryan emperors that royal power became particularly significant. This is clear from Ashoka's edicts and the *Arthashastra*. The king was regarded as the cornerstone of the state. In the *Arthashastra* it is written: "The state is the king", which sums up the essence of the whole concept of statehood current at the time.

The principle of heredity was adhered to very strictly. Before a king died one of his sons was appointed heir to the throne (more often than not this was the eldest), although the actual attainment of power was preceded by fierce rivalry between all the king's sons.

When the new king came to the throne he performed a special consecration ceremony (known as *abhisheka*), that was marked by lavish feasts.

By the age of the Mauryan kings there had evolved the concept of *chakravartin* (literally—he who turns the wheel of power)—the single ruler, whose power stretched, as it were, over enormous territories from the Western to the Eastern Ocean, from the Himalayas to the south seas. This concept was elaborated in particular detail in the *Arthashastra*. In short it reflected a new stage

in the development of the Indian state linked with the formation of an enormous empire.

To judge by the Ashokan inscriptions the Mauryan king headed the state apparatus and possessed legislative power. Ashoka's edicts were issued at the king's command and in his name. The king himself appointed the major state officials, headed the fiscal administrative organ and was the supreme judge. In the *Arthashastra* we find detailed descriptions of the king's functions and his pastime. Particular attention was paid to the king's bodyguard, since conspiracies against the king were frequent occurrences at court. Megasthenes, ambassador at the court of Chandragupta, paid special attention to this and noted in his writings: "The king does not sleep by day and even at night he is obliged to change his resting-place from time to time for fear of evil plotting. When he sets out to hunt, the king is surrounded by women, and this entourage of women is ringed by spear-bearers. The route the procession follows is roped off on both sides. He who penetrates within the ropes where the women walk sets his life in the jaws of death."

An important role at court was that played by the king's chief priest, who always came from the influential Brahman varna.

The king personally selected his trustworthy helpers, although they too were the object of secret surveillance. The king subjected the members of his retinue to special tests. Those who failed to acquit themselves with honour ran the risk of hard labour in the mines. Thus great importance was attached to the surveillance network. Not only were officials under close watch but also the ordinary inhabitants of the towns and villages. Particular attention was paid to the activities of the king's sons, who, as we are told in the *Arthashastra*, "devour their parent like crawfish".

At night the king would receive secret agents and during the day, as we learn from the *Arthashastra*, he was occupied with affairs of state or enjoying various entertainments. The king was regarded as the supreme commander. To judge by the accounts written by Megasthenes, the number of the king's forces was amazing. In Chandragupta's military camp there were 400,000 soldiers.

The *Parishad* and the *Sabha*

An important function in the state administration was that of the council of the king's ministers, known as the *parishad*. This body was not initiated by the Mauryans (it had existed in earlier times), although it was precisely under the Mauryan rulers that the *parishad* assumed the functions of a political council. The *parishad* was mentioned in the emperor's edicts and its work is described in detail in the *Arthashastra* in which it is called the *mantriparishad* (the assembly of the *mantrins* or king's "ministers"). The council was required to keep

a check on the whole administrative system and the implementation of the king's orders. Apart from the *parishad* there was also a strictly secret council consisting merely of a small group of persons enjoying special trust. If there were extremely urgent matters to be settled members of both councils were known to gather together in a single body.

In the *Arthashastra* it is stressed that the number of the *parishad*'s members varied according to state requirements of the moment. During the reign of Ashoka the *parishad* was called upon to supervise the implementation of the demands of *Dharma*, and it laid down the obligations of officials undertaking tours of inspection through various parts of the country. To judge by one of Ashoka's edicts the *parishad* could meet without the king necessarily being present, although Ashoka demanded that in emergencies he should always be informed of such meetings without delay. Within the *parishad* itself heated arguments often broke out, which at times led the king to intervene. Sometimes there were differences between the king and the *parishad*; these differences assumed particularly acute form during the last period of Ashoka's reign, when opposition to the king had formed.

The *parishad*, as a political organ, consisted of nobles—from the warrior and priestly castes—who went out of their way to protect their privileges and limit the absolute power of their ruler. In earlier times, for example during the Vedic age, the *parishad* had embraced a wider range of members and as an organ of power it had been more democratic, bringing more tangible influence to bear upon the raja and his policies. Gradually the number of members decreased and membership became restricted to representatives of the aristocracy, while the role of the *parishad* was little by little reduced to purely consultative functions with the king as the final authority. However even in the Mauryan period, when royal power was particularly strong, the *parishad* retained considerable influence, and the Mauryan rulers found themselves unable to ignore it.

The *sabha* underwent similar evolution: initially it had been a broad-based assembly of nobles and representatives of the people that had carried out most important political functions. During the Mauryan age membership of the *sabha* was restricted to a much narrower section of society, and the *sabha* in its turn was reduced to a royal council—the *raja-sabha*. However, in comparison with the *parishad* the *raja-sabha* still remained a more representative organ. Certain representatives of the urban and rural population were allowed to participate in it, and in a number of cases the king found himself obliged to turn to the *raja-sabha* for support. From contemporary sources it emerges for example that Ashoka addressed the members of the *raja-sabha* in person. There is mention of the *sabha* of the Chandragupta reign in the grammatical work of Patanjali (second century B.C.).

Passages in written source materials relating to the influence of the *parishad* and the *raja-sabha* within the system of state power during the Mauryan period are of considerable interest. They show that even in periods when the monarch's power was particularly pronounced the institutions and traditions of ancient political organisation, which to a certain extent limited the king's power, were still retained.

Taxation

The collection of taxes was regarded as one of the king's most important functions, and for this reason source materials contain detailed exposition of the underlying principles and the organisation of the system of taxation.

In the various political treatises it is stressed time and again that the treasury constituted the foundation of power, and that the king should make a point of keeping a tight control over fiscal matters.

The proportion of citizens' incomes collected as tax was extremely large, but in these treatises it is always pointed out that the king collected taxes so as to be able to protect his subjects, and that they represented a small reward for him, as it were, in recognition of his concern for the people of his lands. By the Mauryan period the old taxation system had undergone far-reaching changes. The gifts that had been offered to the king in the past, often on a voluntary basis, now took the form of compulsory commitments, of strictly fixed taxes. The main form of taxation was the *bhaga* (king's share) which usually constituted one-sixth of the agricultural produce. The king, if he so wished, could reduce this tax or even make someone exempt from it altogether, but this occurred very rarely and in special cases. The king was even referred to as the *shadbhagin* (i.e., he who receives the sixth part). Considerably larger taxes—of anything up to a quarter or even a third of the crop—could be exacted in certain areas enjoying rich soil and plentiful rain. The king's share could be increased when the state was undergoing financial difficulties.

Of interest in this connection is the somewhat unusual statement by Patanjali to the effect that the Mauryan kings "in their efforts to obtain gold installed idols". It is likely that the images referred to are representations of the gods, which were set up in special places after which the offerings brought to honour them went to the treasury. It is possible even that the Mauryan rulers simply took the idols of gods from some temples: to judge by the *Arthashastra*, during periods of financial crisis the king was permitted to take valuables belonging to the temples to fill his own coffers.

The group of subjects who had to pay the bulk of the taxes were the cultivators—the free members of the village community owning small plots of land. In addition, artisans, traders and livestock breeders also had to pay taxes to the king.

Source materials reveal that certain strata of the population were exempt from taxation. Classical authors and the ancient Indian "laws" or *Shastras* reveal that the Brahmins in their capacity as experts in the holy writings and representatives of the higher *varna* were exempt from taxation. In some writings it is even noted that exaction of taxes from experts in the Vedic texts, from hermits and the king's priests was punished by fines. Brahmin sources attempted to explain this with reference to the fact that the Brahmins through their work and religious services made a special contribution of their own, as it were, to the state treasury and promoted the country's prosperity.

Some texts include in their lists of those exempt from taxation the "king's men", i.e., those engaged in the king's service. This meant that the main burden of taxation fell on the cultivators and artisans, thus exacerbating the contradictions between the classes, estates and various social groups.

In the *Arthashastra* we find a detailed description of the functions carried out by the revenue officials and the work of the special tax department headed by the chief tax collector.

Administration of the Provinces

The administration of the provinces was ordered in such a way as to respect old traditions and institutions, although the Mauryan rulers changed the system that had existed before their empire came into being, adapting it to the new conditions. New institutions for state administration were set up as well. The nucleus of the empire was the *vijita* (literally, the conquered) which incorporated the king's actual domain and certain areas subject to particularly strict control from the central administration. The empire was divided into provinces of which four enjoyed special status: the North-Western Province with its capital in Taxila, the Western Province with its capital at Ujjayani, the Eastern Province—Kalinga—with its capital in Tosali and the Southern Province with its capital of Suvarnagiri. Each of these provinces was governed by one of the king's sons: the particularly high status accorded to these territories can be attributed to their special position in the empire and to the role they played in the country's political, economic and cultural life. The creation of a special Southern Province can be accounted for by the importance of the "southern question" that had loomed large even in the time of King Bindusara. While the princes in Taxila, Ujjayani and Tosali bore the title *kumara* (a prince of ordinary status), the one who ruled in Suvarnagiri was referred to in Ashoka's edicts as *ayaputa* (the Sanskrit *aryaputra*, evidently heir to the throne) which points to his special, higher status. There is good reason to assume that in Ashoka's reign the seat of the heir was stationed there.

The main provinces enjoyed considerable autonomy. Their princes (except that of Kalinga) used to send out special inspectors to

supervise the activities of the local officials. The ruler of Kalinga however did not have this right: the emperor himself used to organise inspection tours of its territories. Ashoka dealt directly even with the local officials in Kalinga. Kalinga had only recently been annexed and although it received the status of main province it was nevertheless still seen as a conquered territory (*vijita*) and was under the direct control of the central administration.

Apart from the division of the country into four main provinces, the latter were divided into *janapadas* (ordinary provinces), *pradeshas* (regions) and *ahales* (districts). The lowest unit of provincial administration was the *gramā* (village). Important state officials known as *rājyukas* headed the *janapadas*. The word *rājyuka* means literally "holder of the cord" and this term can most likely be traced back to the original functions of these officials who were called upon to measure out the land. Later their role was enhanced and their duties became more varied. They were allotted specific judicial functions in their provinces and the former rural officials emerged as leaders of the provincial administrative apparatus. It would appear that the *rājyukas* of Ashoka's reign resemble the rural officials (or *agoranomois*) in the kingdom of Chandragupta, a detailed description of whom has been left us by the Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes. It should however be noted that by the reign of Ashoka the functions of the rural officials had changed somewhat. The *mahamatras* in charge of the *ahales* were evidently accountable to the *rājyukas*.

In the principal towns of the districts there were chancelleries where the officials gathered for regular meetings. Instructions drawn up on these occasions and copied out by scribes (or *lipikaras*) would be sent out to all parts of the district. The scribes of this period were able to write in various scripts—Brahmi, Kharoshthi, Greek.

In the edicts of Ashoka we find mention of special officials employed to guard the empire's frontiers—*antamahamatras*—who were also familiar to the author of the *Arthashastra*. They must have enjoyed fairly high status since they received a very high remuneration. Although theirs was a policy of strict centralisation, the Mauryan rulers at the same time did not embark on the elimination of many old institutions and traditions, which they saw themselves obliged to respect.

Despite their efforts to combat separatism, the Mauryan kings allowed certain of the republican formations (*ganas*) to retain their autonomous status within the empire, and in particular in those areas where it was hardest of all to effect strict control. Megasthenes refers to autonomous, independent city states in the Mauryan empire which retained many features of the old political patterns, although these *ganas* were incorporated in the overall system of imperial administration.

Urban Administration

Some features of self-government were also retained in urban administration during the Mauryan period. In the inscriptions of Ashoka there is reference to the division of the towns into inner towns, i.e., those within the *vijita*, and external ones. The capital of the empire was Pataliputra. Megasthenes wrote of special urban officials—*astynomois*—who formed six small councils, each consisting of five men. Each council supervised one of the following spheres of the town's life: the crafts, the foreigners, the registration of births and deaths, commercial activities, the stamping of manufactured goods produced by the artisans for sale, and collection of the tax on articles sold, namely one-tenth of the purchase price. Megasthenes' account shows which questions of urban administration were the most significant, demanding special control by the authorities. The very existence of administrative councils in the towns is worthy of note. The town council was actually the main administrative organ in the town, although its members were evidently not elected, as had been the case during the Vedic period, but rather appointed or approved by the central or provincial administration.

The central administration endeavoured to deprive the town councils of their independence, yet they succeeded in retaining a certain degree of autonomy. Some towns, for instance, had their own seals, their own arms, and the town councils conducted transactions with craft guilds.

Each group of the population inhabited a specific part of the town according to *varna* and occupation, a practice which may have been a survival of an extremely ancient tradition of tribal organisation. Town officials exercised control over public buildings, the cleanliness and upkeep of the town, its holy places and temples. The majority of the buildings in the towns were made of wood, as a result of which protection against fire hazards assumed particular significance. In the summer no one was allowed to light fires and infringements of this rule were punished by large fines. All house-owners were obliged to possess fire-prevention equipment. In the *Arthashastra* we are told that tubs of water had always to be at the ready. Many vessels containing water were put out in the street. To judge by the evidence found in the *Arthashastra*, life in the towns was strictly regimented. It was forbidden to be out in the streets after a special evening signal had been given, and if anyone was bold enough to walk past the king's palace he was arrested and fined.

Ashoka's Religious Policy

The Mauryan period was marked by wide propagation of the Buddhist faith in India. Buddhism, which had begun as a small sect of itinerant monks several hundred years before the Mauryan dynasty,

in the third century B.C. was to become one of the largest movements in the spiritual life of ancient Indian society. By that time there existed an organised Buddhist Order—*Sangha*, and the main canonical writings had been compiled. It is no accident that precisely Buddhism spread widely at that time and enjoyed support among the Mauryan rulers. Buddhism, with its ideal of an autocratic ruler—the *chakravartin*—at the head of a strong state came to provide the ideological basis for the formation of a united empire.

To judge by the various sources available Ashoka was not converted to Buddhism overnight. At his father's court he had met representatives of different schools, of orthodox and so-called heretical sympathies. Later Ashoka visited a Buddhist *Sangha*, made a close study of the fundamental teachings of Buddha and became an *upasaka*, i.e., a lay Buddhist. In his edicts he himself tells of the evolution of his beliefs. Initially the emperor did not devote particular attention to the Buddhist Order, but later, after personally acquainting himself with the life of Buddhist monks in the capital, he began actively to support the Buddhists and help their Order. His interest in Buddhist teaching and Buddhist ethical standards became particularly marked after the war with Kalinga, when the policy of *Dharmavijaya*—the propagation of the basic standards for behaviour (*Dharma*)—assumed special significance, although Ashoka had become a follower of Buddha before the war started.

While being a practising Buddhist, Ashoka in the course of his whole reign never joined the monastic order and never abandoned the reins of government to anyone else. Some scholars see Ashoka as a monk-king who at the end of his reign went off to a Buddhist monastery; however extant sources do not support this point of view. Equally unfounded is the theory that Buddhism during Ashoka's reign was a state religion.

Although Ashoka honoured the Buddhist Order with his patronage, Buddhism was not made a state religion. The salient feature of his religious policy was tolerance and he adhered to this throughout almost the whole of his reign.

In his edicts Ashoka speaks out in favour of the unity of all sects, but as something that should be achieved not through coercion, but by developing the fundamental principles of their teachings. To judge by these edicts, Ashoka presented caves to the Ajivikas, who at that time were some of the main opponents of the Buddhists and enjoyed considerable influence among the people. It also emerges from the edicts that the king used to send his representatives to communities of the Jains and to the Brahmins. There is reason to believe that Ashoka was to a certain extent obliged to pursue a policy of religious tolerance, for orthodox and heretical teachings (apart from Buddhism) were still too strong for him to do otherwise. It was precisely his policy of religious tolerance combined with skilful control exercised by the state over the life of various religious sects

which enabled Ashoka to avoid conflict with the strong stratum of Brahmans, the Ajivikas, the Jainas, and at the same time to promote Buddhism so effectively. When Ashoka abandoned this policy of religious tolerance in the last years of his reign and began to pursue an overt pro-Buddhist policy, this gave rise to determined opposition among the adherents of other religions and brought to serious consequences for the king and his administration.

At the end of his reign Ashoka was in very close contact with the Buddhist Order, and after abandoning his former principles he began even to harass the Ajivikas and the Jainas.

This seriously complicated relations between the Buddhists and the representatives of other religions at that period. Certain difficulties were to appear among the Buddhists themselves: sources from that time tell of a clash between the representatives of various schools of Buddhist thought. This made the emperor strive to keep the Buddhist Order united. He issued a special edict concerning the struggle against the dissident monks and nuns who were undermining the unity of the *Sangha*. According to this edict they were to be expelled from the Order. At the same time Ashoka recommended that Buddhist monks should make a careful study of Buddhist texts, listing a number of Buddhist canonical writings devoted in particular to questions of discipline.

According to Buddhist tradition, during the reign of Ashoka the Third Council of Buddhists took place at Pataliputra.

One of the distinctive features of Ashoka's religious policy was that he attempted to gain the support not only of the Buddhist monks but above all that of broad strata of the laity—the followers of Buddha.

In this respect we may well say that Ashoka was the first king of India who appreciated the importance of Buddhism for consolidating the empire and who encouraged its propagation. Most of his edicts were addressed not to monks, but to laymen, who, it would appear, were not well informed about the basic tenets of Buddhist doctrine and its philosophical categories. This explains why in the inscriptions there was no mention of *nirvana*, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, etc. The all-important feature was the practical implications of the inscriptions, which the emperor himself called the *Dharma* Edicts. These ethical principles that were well known to laymen, including non-Buddhists, were broadly supported among the masses and indeed various social groups.

Ashoka's *Dharma* Edicts

Dharma is usually held to mean rules for man's behaviour and a righteous way of life, although the term can mean doctrine as such in the more narrow sense as associated with Buddhist teaching.

The term *Dharma* is mentioned in these two different senses in Ashoka's edicts. In most inscriptions the word *Dharma* is used to

designate a collection of moral principles, while in the strictly Buddhist edicts the term implies Buddha's teaching. These moral precepts included obedience towards parents, respect for elders, generosity, refusal to kill living creatures, etc., in other words they were concerned with standards of human behaviour that were not specifically related to Buddhism, Brahmanism or any other religious teachings. These were traditional ethical principles easily comprehended by various strata of the population regardless of their ethnic origin or religious allegiance. Some scholars mistakenly assume that these rules are strictly Buddhist religious principles, although Buddhism did in fact exert a considerable influence on the interpretation of *Dharma* to be found in Ashoka's edicts. It is revealing to note that in the Greek versions of the king's edicts the word *Dharma* is expressed via a Greek term (*eusebeia*) which conveys the idea of righteousness, *not* religious belief. It is in this general way that Ashoka presents in his edicts the question as to the results which man achieves if he consistently observes the principles of *Dharma*. The king's favour, prosperity and attainment of heaven (*svarga*) would fall to the man who was steadfast and true in his observance of *Dharma*. The last of these tenets was all too understandable to the broad masses of the population: it had been characteristic already during the Vedic age and was then taken over by the Buddhists. Yet there is no actual reference to the religious or philosophical principles of Buddhism in the edicts, since they were addressed to a broad circle of laymen adhering to various creeds. Moreover, Ashoka's *Dharma* did not conflict with some of the fundamental ethical principles upheld by the main religions of that period. The emperor referred to those principles as the essence of the teachings accepted by various sects and schools. The appeal for men to study *Dharma* is found in the edicts side by side with an acceptance and tolerance of all teachings.

The principles of *Dharma* to be found in Ashoka's edicts were designed to provide common ground for the population of the whole empire and, as it were, to take precedence over *Dharmas* of the *varnas*, associations and various social groups.

The policy aimed at propagating the principles of *Dharma*—*Dharmavijaya* (literally, victory through righteousness) constituted one of the most important parts of Ashoka's overall policy. Special officials were appointed—*Dharma-mahamatras*—to make sure that the norms of *Dharma* were observed.

These officials were sent to keep watch over the adherents of various religions. In his edicts the emperor declares outright that the *dharma-mahamatras* were supposed to ascertain how Buddhists, Brahmans, Jainas, and Ajivikas put *Dharma* into practice.

This policy made it possible to maintain control over the various groups of the population and combat separatism.

Ashoka Is Stripped of Power and the Empire Falls

For any study of the latest period in the history of the Mauryan empire the Buddhist legends about King Ashoka are extremely interesting, since epigraphic sources for these years are fragmentary to say the least.

Particularly significant are the unusual accounts of the way in which Ashoka was stripped of power during the last years of his reign. These accounts are to be found in writings of several different kinds compiled over a wide range of years.

We learn that towards the end of his reign Ashoka bled the state coffers white as a result of the generous gifts he made to the Buddhist Order to promote the propagation of Buddha's teaching. At that time Ashoka's grandson Sampadi (Samprati) became heir to the throne. The king's high-ranking officials informed him of the emperor's excessive gifts to the monks and demanded that they be revoked at once. On Sampadi's orders Ashoka's instructions with regard to the offerings to the Buddhist Order were not carried out. In actual fact power was consolidated in Sampadi's hands. Ashoka, according to these sources, was obliged to make the bitter admission that his orders were no more than dead letter, and he was stripped of his kingdom and power, although formally he still remained king.

Data gleaned from Buddhist sources may well seem completely fictitious, yet in actual fact they provide what is for all intents and purposes a reliable picture of the tense political situation that obtained towards the end of Ashoka's reign. His pro-Buddhist policy gave rise to serious discontent among the followers of orthodox Brahmanism and the Jainas. To judge by a number of sources Sampadi was an adherent of Jainism and enjoyed the support of powerful court officials. By this time the country was facing economic difficulties, and uprisings were breaking out in various parts of the country, including one in Taxila—one of the largest of the period—where the local ruler led the disavowed.

Source materials tell us that Queen Tishyarakshita (who was also an opponent of Buddhism) took part in this conspiracy as well. In one of the last edicts the royal command is issued not in Ashoka's name as was the case before, but in the name of the queen. The command concerns various gifts, i.e., the very question which, according to Buddhist sources, formally led to the king and his entourage coming into conflict with each other. There is good reason to believe that the coincidence of epigraphic data and Buddhist tradition was no mere accident. It reflects the real state of affairs during the last years of Ashoka's reign.

It also emerges that Ashoka's heirs did not succeed in preserving the unity of the empire. Available sources give us reason to assume that the empire first split up into two parts: the eastern part with its centre in Pataliputra, and the western part with its centre in Taxila.

Passages in the available sources bearing on Ashoka's direct heirs contain many contradictions, but there is reason to believe that it was either Sampadi who became king in Pataliputra, or Dasharatha whom some *Puranas* present as Ashoka's son and successor. Like Ashoka, Dasharatha bore the title "dear to the gods" and patronised the Ajivikas, as can be deduced from his edicts referring to the bestowing of caves upon the latter. The next years were marked by a rapid succession of different kings on the Magadha throne, till in about 180 B.C. the last representative of the Mauryan dynasty, Brihadratha, was killed as the result of yet another conspiracy led by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra. The dynasty which followed was that of the Shungas, which proved unable to maintain the former greatness of the Mauryan empire. It would appear that the north-western regions and certain parts of the Deccan had been lost by the time the Shungas came to power.

Interesting information concerning the relations between the Seleucids and the Mauryan rulers towards the end of their reign is provided in the writings of Polibius. According to him the well-known Seleucid king, Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.), crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains after his campaigns in the East and then renewed the alliance with the Indian king Sophagasenus (evidently the Mauryan king Subhagasena). Next Antiochus was given elephants in India before marching on into Arachosia. It seems probable that by 206 B.C. the Mauryan kings were no longer in a position to withstand Antiochus' moves, as the latter marched into Arachosia. Nor is it to be ruled out that this region was no longer a part of the empire at that time. Antiochus was nevertheless obliged to take Sophagasenus into account. This is why he reinstituted the friendly relations which had existed between the Seleucid and Mauryan rulers.

The Shungas and the Invasion of the Indo-Greeks

In the age of the Shungas the "Western question" became the all-important political issue. To judge by Patanjali's treatise, the *Mahabhashya*, the army of the Yavanas (the Indo-Greeks) laid siege to the Indian cities Saketa and Madhyamika. This fact is also referred to in the work *Yuga-purana*, from which it also emerges that the troops advanced from Saketa to Pataliputra, but later because of internal strife in the army itself were obliged to lift their siege on the Shungas' capital.

The invasion by the Indo-Greeks appears to have taken place in the middle of the second century B.C., during the reign of Pushyamitra. The king of the Indo-Greeks at the time was Menander.

Clashes with the Indo-Greeks also took place during the reigns of Pushyamitra's successors, in particular during that of his grandson Vasumitra, who however succeeded in securing an impressive

victory, after which relations between the Shungas and the Indo-Greeks were calm. Epigraphic evidence shows that the Greek king Antialcidas sent an embassy to the Shunga ruler Bhagabhadra. The embassy was sent to Vidisha, to which city the capital of the Shunga kings had evidently been transferred.

For over a hundred years the Shungas held on to their power. Subsequently the throne fell to the Kanvas (68-22 B.C.) under whom the process of decentralisation continued apace. Many parts of the empire broke away from the centre, and new local dynasties came into being. It is difficult to say how reliable are the accounts to the effect that the Shungas' policy was of an anti-Buddhist nature, particularly when it comes to Pushyamitra, however it is clear that at the time Buddhism no longer received the strong support it had enjoyed under Ashoka. During the period of Shunga rule the cult of Vishnu also enjoyed wide popularity as can be seen from the inscriptions of the Shunga kings. Particularly important was the cult of Vasudeva.

The *Puranas* show that the Mauryans held the throne of Magadha for 137 years. It was a period of major political events, of significant developments in the social and cultural spheres, that was to leave a deep imprint on the evolution of ancient India's society and state. The creation of a united Indian state led to interaction and communication between a variety of peoples, a cross-fertilisation of their cultures and traditions, and to a blurring of narrow tribal categories. At the same time links with other countries developed on a wider scale. During the Mauryan period Indian culture spread to the states of South-East Asia and Sri Lanka. It was at that time that the foundations of many state institutions were laid that were to develop in the years that followed.

Despite their strong army, powerful state apparatus and administrative network, despite the policy of *Dharmavijaya* directed at bringing together diverse peoples and regions, the Mauryans failed to preserve even that instable unity. The empire was a colourful assortment of tribes and peoples at very different stages of development.

THE DECCAN AND SOUTHERN INDIA IN THE MAGADHA AND MAURYAN PERIODS

Materials pertaining to Southern India and the states of that area, to the political, economic and cultural development in that part of the sub-continent are considerably less prolific than those bearing on the history of Northern India in the same period, i.e., the second half of the first millennium B.C. Literary sources in the local languages of Southern India only appear in the first centuries A.D., and for this reason the main source is the inscriptions found there (Prakrit and Sanskrit ones).

Ashoka's edicts contain a list of southern lands outside the limits of his empire—the kingdoms of the Pandyas, Cholas, Cheras, Satyaputras and Keralaputras. In his work dating from a somewhat earlier period Megasthenes mentions the Pandya realm, which indicates that a state must have existed there at least by the end of the fourth century B.C. It is interesting to note that writers taking part in Alexander of Macedon's campaign had heard about Southern India and even Sri Lanka. One of these, Onesicritus, recorded sea voyages to that island. During the era of the Magadha and Mauryan kings contacts between Northern and Southern India had developed on a firmer and more regular basis. In the works of the grammarians Katyayana (*circa* fourth century B.C.), and later Patanjali, references are to be found to regions of Southern India. The culture of Northern India was spreading further southwards, and economic ties were growing up. This course of events was accelerated when certain parts of Southern India became part of the Mauryan empire. In the *Arthashastra* many details concerning wares from Southern India are to be found, and also those concerning trade routes that crossed the territory.

During the rule of the Mauryan kings Buddhism began to spread to the south as is borne out by the Buddhist inscriptions dating from the third and second centuries B.C. that have been discovered in parts of the Deccan.

After the collapse of Mauryan rule a number of regions in the Deccan, that had been part of the empire, began to fight for their independence, and it was only by force of arms that the Shungas were able to pacify Vidarbha, although the southern part of that region succeeded eventually in gaining its independence.

The best known and strongest state in the Deccan in the post-Mauryan period was that of the Satavahanas, but many pages of its history remain a riddle still to be solved. Data that can be gleaned from the *Puranas* enables us to link the Satavahanas and the Andhras, who later, to judge by inscriptions, ruled over the territory on the west coast as well. The founder of the dynasty was Simuka (or Shishuka, as he is referred to in the *Puranas*) but the most powerful ruler of the early period of Satavahana history was King Satakani (or Shatakarni in the *Puranas*). During his reign the state extended its frontiers considerably and the king himself came to be known as "Lord of the Southern State". Shatakarni had to wage a struggle against a strong state on the east coast, namely Kalinga, whose king, Kharavela, advanced towards the west with his army. At that time Kalinga became one of the most powerful states in India. To judge by the Kharavela inscription found in Hathigumpha (not far from modern Bhubaneswar) the Kalingan troops emerged victorious from the struggle against the western peoples—the Bhojakas and the Rathikas. Next Kharavela led three campaigns to the north, laid siege to the ancient capital of Magadha, Rajagriha, and then advanced towards

the Ganges. The Kharavela inscription reveals that the king of Magadha, Bahasatimita, bowed to the might of the king of Kalinga. Kharavela embarked on a military expedition to the south and his army even reached the Pandya Kingdom. After the reign of Kharavela Kalinga's star was no longer in the ascendant, and indeed less and less references are to be found to it from then on.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Agriculture

The Magadha and Mauryan age marks a very important stage in the economic development of ancient India. At that time the main principles underlying the social and economic structure of ancient Indian society, that would subsequently be further elaborated, had taken shape. It was also blatantly clear that development in the individual regions was most uneven. One of the most economically developed centres of Northern India was the Ganges valley, where there were fertile alluvial soils and rich deposits of metals.

An important factor was the wide spread of iron, which was used both in agriculture and in crafts as well. Man started to make agricultural implements from iron, and in particular ploughshares, a development which brought about qualitative changes in both the character of agricultural work and in the results of that work. The *Sutta-Nipata*, one of the most ancient of Buddhist writings, tells of a Brahman who ploughed the land using a plough for the purpose. The ploughshare which he used (evidently one made of iron) grew so hot that he had to dip it in water. Agriculture becomes the main form of productive labour. In areas with the more fertile soils cultivators succeeded in reaping two or even three harvests a year. In Panini's grammar special terms for the spring and autumn harvests are listed. The ancient Indians were skilled cultivators and were well versed in the nature and properties of the various soils. The main cereals grown were rice, wheat and barley. Rice grains were found in the layers relating to the Magadha and Mauryan periods when archeologists excavated settlements in Northern and Central India. Particularly large territories were given over to rice cultivation in the lands of Magadha. In the Buddhist texts there are numerous references to good harvests of rice in Magadha. Patanjali also mentioned in his grammatical writings that rice was the main cereal grown in Magadha, while in the arid areas of Western India barley was the more common crop. Archeological findings and evidence gleaned from written sources show that in the western part of the sub-continent wheat and beans were also extensively sown, as well as barley. Further south where the climate is drier and the soil less fertile millet was more important.

During the Magadha and Mauryan periods irrigation also developed apace. Many sources contain mention of special canals and reservoirs built specially for irrigation purposes, and there are direct references to irrigation of fields in Magadha. Large-scale irrigation projects were organised by the state; in addition, the land was irrigated by village communities on a joint basis and also by individual farmers. In an inscription of the second century B.C. found in Saurashtra there is reference to the building of a reservoir as early as the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. Megasthenes also wrote of irrigation methods used in the Mauryan empire (more than likely they would have been near the capital); he referred to the officials employed to inspect the canals and the supply of water to the fields.

Although agriculture became the main sphere of production at this period, livestock breeding was also important. Considerable store was set by livestock since apart from its use in the fields it was also used for transport purposes. Livestock was also very important in times of war. In Buddhist writings there are references to rich owners of livestock; one rich farmer had a herd of twenty-seven thousand milking cows. In farms of that size special herdsmen and farmhands were employed to care for the cattle. As a rule, livestock was branded so as to avoid ownership disputes.

The Growth of Towns and the Rise of Handicrafts

A distinctive feature of life in the Magadha and Mauryan periods was the growth of towns, which were becoming centres of craftsmanship and trade, although a large section of the population still lived in the villages.

Archeological findings show that the most rapid expansion of towns took place between the sixth and third centuries B.C. That was the time when urban fortifications were built and town-planning was underway, although towns differed sharply one from another. Pataliputra was built in the shape of a parallelogram, Kaushambi in the form of a trapezium, Shravasti was triangular in shape and Vaishali rectangular. The town that was biggest in size and had the largest population was the imperial capital Pataliputra. According to data quoted by Megasthenes, who lived in the capital, it must have occupied an area of over twenty-five square kilometres. If these data are taken as reliable, Pataliputra must be regarded as one of the largest cities of ancient times. Alexandria was only a third the size, and the well-known Indian city of Kaushambi—the capital of the state of Vatsa—was eleven times smaller. Megasthenes wrote that in the imperial capital there were 570 towers and that more than sixty gates led into the city.

The main building material was still wood. It was only on rare occasions that stone was used. Even Ashoka's royal palace was made

of wood, as excavations have shown. Wood was subjected to special processing that preserved it from decay in the course of many centuries. When the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien arrived in Pataliputra six centuries after the reign of Ashoka he was quite amazed by the grandiose building and wrote that it must have been built by gods, rather than men. The techniques used to preserve the wood and the building methods have also made a deep impression on archeologists who first started investigating the remains of the royal palace at the beginning of this century.

Craftsmanship also achieved a high level at this time, particularly weaving, metal-working and jewellery. The finest fabrics were held to be the cottons woven in Varanasi, Mathura and Ujjayani. Fabrics were exported to the West via Barygaza. Gandhara was famous for its woolen materials.

The *Arthashastra* tells of the special royal workshops where metal was processed and over which state officials exercised strict control. Apart from the royal armouries, there were also metal craftsmen who had their own undertakings and carried out commissions. In the villages potters, carpenters and blacksmiths were held in particularly high esteem.

Craftsmen had their own guilds known as *shreni*. In some respects they were independent and they had their own charter. The artisans who belonged to a given guild were obliged to abide by the charter, and when necessary the guild would come out in support of its members. The state tried to establish control over the activities of the guilds, demanded that they register and forbade them to transfer from one region of the country to another without notifying the authorities.

Trade. The Appearance of Coins

Merchants had similar organisations. Like the artisans they were specialised. The merchants of each particular region engaged in selling one specific type of ware. During the reigns of the Magadha and Mauryan kings a more extensive network of communications between the various regions grew up, roads were built and special trade routes established between the capitals of the various states. The most famous of these were the Northern and Southern Highways. Megasthenes wrote of the Royal Highway which stretched all the way from the north-western frontier to Pataliputra and then still further east.

Apart from overland trade, river and sea routes also came to be used. Source materials tell of Indian merchants undertaking dangerous sea voyages that lasted for as long as six months. Vessels set out for Sri Lanka, Burma and Southern Arabia. Many Indian wares were

dispatched to the Hellenistic countries: spices, precious stones, articles fashioned from ivory, as well as rare kinds of wood.

At about the same time money appeared and started to circulate, initially as pieces of metal, which gradually assumed a specific shape and came to bear various symbols and inscriptions.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. punch-marked coins appeared, for the most part of copper or silver. In the areas which had been incorporated into the Achaemenid empire Persian sigloi started to circulate, and Greek tetradrachms were the unit of exchange in the north-west.

The punch-marked coins unearthed by archeologists in layers relating to the Mauryan period are distinguished by a number of recurrent symbols which may have been emblems of the Mauryan kings. Written sources record the names of various coins: karshapanas (silver and copper), kakanis (copper), suvarnas (gold).

The *Arthashastra* also lists the duties of the officials who had to supervise the minting of coins and money circulation. At that stage the concepts of credit, interest and pawning were already known.

Landownership

In the second half of the first millennium B.C. the system of private landownership was further developed. The ancient Indians had clearly appreciated the difference between ownership of land and use of land, having separate terms for these notions. The concept of ownership was linked with the possessive pronoun *sra* and its derivatives. The verb *bhuj* (to use or to enjoy) was used to designate temporary possession as well as the related terms *bhoga*, *bhukti*, etc. In the *Sutras* and *Shastras* cases are recorded when men became property owners after purchasing or discovering land; at the same time it is pointed out that only after legal confirmation and on a basis of legal rights could an individual start to own what he has previously been using. These principles applied, among other things, to land. Farming land is listed among the main types of property in the *Manava Dharmashastra* (second century B.C. to the second century A.D.).

The lands of the country were divided into several categories—private, communal and royal.

Among the private landowners there also existed a number of different categories: apart from rich landowners there were also the poor owners of small plots. Some estates were so large that their tilling required several hundred ploughs. In such estates the cultivation work was carried out by slaves and hired labourers.

While the large estates reached the size of 1,000 *karisas* (one *karisa* amounts to about 0.25 hectares), there also existed extremely small holdings. The owners of the small plots worked them themselves,

with the help of their families. Property rights were protected; illegal appropriation of the land belonging to somebody else was made subject to large fines and such violators would be publicly branded as thieves. According to the *Shastras* appropriation of land was subject to the same fines as those for theft. Interference in the affairs of a landowner was prohibited. In the *Manava Dharmashastra* it is written that if a man who owns no plot of his own has seed and sows it in someone else's field, then he has no right to the harvest. Only the owner of a plot of land could decide questions connected with his land, which he could sell, give away, mortgage or lease out. Indian sources contain references to a Brahman giving away part of his land, to a merchant purchasing an orchard from the king's heir, etc. Thus, Diodorus' statement (that can perhaps be traced back to Megasthenes) that no private individual is allowed to own land contradicts materials in local sources and does not reflect the actual state of affairs at the time.

The *Narada smṛiti* (fourth or fifth century A.D.) contain a rule according to which the king was not allowed to violate the foundations of private ownership, i.e., to encroach upon the house or plot of land belonging to a private individual; however the monarchy sought to limit the rights of the property owners. The king levied taxes on the land of private owners and naturally he kept a careful check on the condition of land. If an individual landowner abandoned his plot at sowing or harvest time, then the king could exact a fine from him. The state also exacted fines from those who failed to pay their taxes, and that was an accepted part of its administrative role; however the state did not have the right to confiscate land from private owners. In the *Bṛhaspati smṛiti* (third and fourth centuries A.D.) attention is drawn to the fact that if the king were to take away privately owned land from one owner and donate it to another he would be acting against the law. The state made sure that rules concerning the sale of land were observed and, if violations did occur, fines were levied.

The village community, like the state, endeavoured to limit private ownership of land, particularly the sale of land to those who were not members of the community. When land was sold pre-emption was given to relatives and neighbours. Their opinions were also taken into account above all when borders between villages and plots of land were disputed. The community also protected the rights of landowners from among its members. The community itself was responsible for the jointly owned lands: grazing grounds, buildings and roads within the communal lands.

Part of the nation's land consisted of state lands and the king's personal possessions. State lands included forests, mines and fallow land. Within the king's territorial possessions (*svabhūmi*) were the royal estates (*sita*). Specially appointed overseers supervised the running of the royal estates. The king was also permitted to own small

tracts of land in the villages. These plots he disposed of as his own: he could donate them, sell them or lease them out. He could do all this, if he so chose, with the lands of the royal estates as well. The estates were worked by slaves and hired labourers, and also various categories of tenant farmers. Some of them worked in return for half the crop, and others were allowed to retain no more than a quarter. In addition there were also tenant farmers working on state land: they were given temporary use of their plots. The position of the tenant farmers on the state land was better than that of those working on the king's estates. Natural resources were regarded as the property of the state, which also had a monopoly over mining. In sources from this ancient period (particularly the *Arthashastra*) a clear distinction is drawn between two categories of land in accordance with the revenues derived from each: the *sita* was levied from the king's land and the *bhaga* was the tax on private estates.

These differences were not appreciated by Megasthenes, who held that all land in India belonged to the king. Evidently this ambassador, living as he did in the capital, was best acquainted with the royal estates and mistakenly equated their administration with that of land throughout India.

As was pointed out earlier, the king did not own all the cultivated land in the state. In ancient Indian writings it is plainly noted that the king levied taxes not in the capacity of a landowner but as the state's sovereign protecting the population of his kingdom. In the *Manava Dharmashastra*, for example, it was stated that if the king levied taxes without protecting his subjects, then he would go to Hell without delay; a king of this type is referred to in one of the ancient epics as "having stolen one-sixth of the harvest".

The complex picture of social relations, and also the data in written sources with regard to the various types of landownership explain why scholars have put forward a variety of hypotheses with reference to the nature of landownership in ancient India. Some historians believed that there was no private ownership, that the king was the supreme landowner or that there was a system of communal ownership. However, source materials indicate that in ancient India there *did* exist various forms of landownership, when landed plots were sometimes the property of several co-owners, so to speak. Moreover, it would hardly be right to expect an unequivocal answer to the question as to the nature of landownership, when we are dealing with such enormous territories as those which made up the Mauryan empire.

In the Ganges valley and in Magadha where the king's power was particularly great, the king's estates and large landed estates had a more important role to play than communal property, while in the north-western part of the country the traditions of communal ownership were stronger.

The Village Community in Ancient India

One of the most important elements in the social and economic pattern of the Magadha and Mauryan age was the village community. It embraced a significant section of the population: the free members of the village community—the cultivators. Unfortunately, the sources relevant to the nature of the village community, its structure and its composition are far from numerous, but they point to the fact that the most widespread form of the community at the time was the village community, although in backward regions of the empire there still existed primitive forms of the village community based on the clan. In source materials village communities are referred to by the term *grama*. However, the meaning of this term is far wider. Sometimes there is mention of thirty families who live in the village, however the number might stretch to as many as one thousand. Each village community—or *grama*—had its limits fixed. The farming land was divided up into plots that belonged to the free members of the village community—the cultivators. Apart from the tax that had to be paid to the king by the owners of plots within the village community's boundaries a joint tax, evidently collected from the jointly owned land, was also levied.

Stratification based on property ownership was already firmly established: apart from the members of the village community who worked on their own plots, there had evolved a village community elite who used slaves or hired labourers to work their plots. Some members of the village community fell victim to poverty, lost their land and farming implements, thus being obliged to work as tenant farmers. The lowest stratum of the village community constituted the exploited group. As a rule they did not possess any means of production. Village artisans also fell into several categories. Some of them worked on their own in their own workshops, while others hired themselves out for a specific remuneration. The combination of the handicrafts and land cultivation created a system of barter in services between the members of the village community. This was a special feature of the ancient Indian village community, and partly goes to explain its inward-looking, patriarchal character.

The village community still retained certain features of a close-knit collective with old-time common traditions. Buddhist writings tell of the joint work in road cleaning and reservoir construction. Free members of the village community celebrated their festivals together including religious ones. In the *Arthashastra* it is stated that if anyone refused to take part in some social function he would be fined. The village community as a whole could make contact with other village communities or with the king. The village community defended the rights of the free members. "The village community (like the state), on the one hand, is the mutual relationship between these free and equal individual property owners, their union against the outside world; at

the same time it is also their guarantee.”* To a certain extent the village community was independent as far as its internal affairs were concerned. The freemen gathered together to resolve various questions of administration, although the heads of the villages were gradually assuming a more and more prominent role. The head of the village community was first elected at an assembly of all members and then approved by the state authorities, thus becoming its representative. Only the free members of the village community had the right to vote while the slaves, servants and hired workers were bereft of all political rights. For a long period the village communities were isolated one from the other, remaining self-sufficient institutions, although gradually they became less self-contained and inward-looking.

Slavery and Its Specific Features

In the Magadha and Mauryan age slavery developed rapidly, as compared to its slow beginnings during the Vedic period. Although the sources of the time are not very rich in information pertaining to slaves and the use of slave labour, it is possible to glean a general picture of slave-ownership in ancient India and the role that slavery played in the structure of society. Unfortunately, insufficient attention has been paid to the question of slavery in ancient India by either West European or Indian scholars. However in recent years the position has changed somewhat; specialised works on this important question have come out (valuable research in this field is that undertaken by Soviet Indologists, in particular G.F. Ilyin).

When considering the question of slavery, even in relation to this specific period of ancient Indian history — namely, the second half of the first millennium B.C. — it is important to bear in mind the varying levels of social relations obtaining in different parts of the enormous empire, the complex patchwork of social institutions, uneven rates of progress, etc. Most sources provide details relating to slaves and the way they were used in the Ganges valley and adjacent territories. The conclusions drawn from these data apply in the main to Magadha and certain other of the more developed regions.

In early Buddhist writings and certain other texts slaves were defined as men dependent on other of their fellow-men. The slave was seen as a thing, or as a variety of a domestic animal. In the early epics a man who had become a slave was referred to as a farm animal, in the same breath as cows, goats, sheep, or horses. In the *Dharmasutras* rules were laid down for the inheritance of slaves, together with other property of the deceased. Slaves, like livestock and precious metals, were divided up among the heirs.

Various sections of the population owned slaves. They were to be found at court, in the houses of prosperous citizens, and in village

* *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, 1857-1858*, Moskau, 1939, S. 379.

communities. A slave could not have any say in his own destiny; he could be given away, sold, pawned or lost over a game of dice. In Buddhist written sources we find frequent references to the current prices for slaves, which varied according to their health and skills. In some texts slaves are referred to as the two-legged ones, so as to distinguish them from the four-legged animals. The lot of the slave was far from easy. Buddhist texts tell how they worked in constant fear of punishment, goaded on by iron rods, some even in fetters. Their food often consisted of no more than thin soup.

Slaves fell into various categories, according to the way in which they had been acquired. In one of the first extant classifications three types of slaves are listed: those who were born in the household, those who were bought, and those who were brought in from another country (evidently prisoners of war). Gradually this list grew to include new types. Rules for the freeing of slaves also come to be formulated. Although it was up to the master to decide whether or not a slave was to be set free, in certain conditions and for a certain price slaves (especially temporary ones) could purchase their freedom.

Considerable attention is devoted to the question of slavery by Kautilya, the author of the *Arthashastra*. He draws a clear distinction between those who were slaves for life and temporary slaves, referring to all manner of cases that could shield free Aryans from being reduced to the status of slaves. According to the *Arthashastra* the slave-owner would even be fined if he did not free a temporary slave after receiving the fixed redemption fee. The author of the *Arthashastra* did not regard the descendants of temporary slaves as slaves. This differed from the regulations stipulated in earlier texts, according to which the children of a slave-woman would fall into the category of slaves. Kautilya came out in defence of the interests of those representatives of the higher *varnas*, who by a twist of fate found themselves in bondage. He did not allow the temporary slaves to be assigned with the dirty work. In the *Arthashastra* we are told that a slave was allowed to have property, but later *Shastras* elaborated a rule according to which a slave was not only forbidden to have property of his own but was also obliged to hand over everything he earned to his master.

The *Arthashastra* reflected the state's attempt to introduce some order and clarity in the status of slaves and a measure of precision into these matters which had assumed great importance by the time.

One of the most important questions connected with the place of slaves in the overall structure of society is that as to the role of slave labour in production, in the basic spheres of economic activity.

Source materials note that slave labour was used in agriculture. Slaves were also used on the royal estates, where, according to evidence from the *Arthashastra*, sowing was a task set aside for the slaves or hired labourers and men "working off" fines. Slaves were

also used in large private farms. They ploughed the soil, sowed, and brought in the harvest. In the *Jatakas* there are references to slaves who together with hired workers cut down trees thus clearing the land for sowing. The owners of small plots of land sometimes also owned slaves, but not of course in any great numbers. In the *Jatakas* references are most frequently made to families with one man-slave or one slave-woman. Slaves could not become members of a Buddhist community, but the *sangha* employed workmen whose status was virtually identical to that of the slave; they worked estates belonging to monasteries or carried out various other tasks. Slave labour was also encountered in the handicrafts, although references to it are rare.

Specific features of slavery as found in ancient Indian society were first and foremost its immaturity and its patriarchal character. Slave labour came very close to the labour of free hired labourers. It is revealing to note that in many sources containing references to slave labour, it is mentioned on a par with the labour of hired labourers. The *Arthashastra* even brackets together in a single group the status of slaves and that of the *karmakaras* (hired labourers).

Another feature of slavery was the wide use of slave labour in the household, which loomed very large in the life of the ancient Indians. Written sources contain frequent examples of the special terms used to designate various types of house-slaves: *ghara-dasa*, *griha-dasa*, *geha-dasa* (*dasi*). The use of slave labour in the household led to a patriarchal note in the relations between master and slave and gave rise to the idea that slavery as a whole was of an extremely mild character. It was possibly this which led to Megasthenes' mistaken statement to the effect that all Indians were free and not one of them was a slave.

Taken all in all, slavery, although it possessed a number of specific characteristics in the ancient Indian context (patriarchal overtones, proximity of slave labour to that of free producers, the existence of undeveloped economic forms), played an important part in the overall structure of society in the Magadha and Mauryan age. In Magadha, the most advanced part of the country where there were enormous royal estates and where there was a considerable number of large, privately owned estates, it was evidently the socio-economic formation based on slave-ownership that was dominant in the complex social structure.

Although the labour of free members of village communities, tenant farmers and hired labourers played a dominant role in the main spheres of production, slavery represented a progressive phenomenon in comparison to primitive society, and it exerted a powerful influence on society as a whole. Slavery was not the only form of exploitation, yet at the same time it was the most important one. In the period under consideration slavery was on the increase.

The Karmakaras

In the era of the Magadha and Mauryan kings wide use was made of hired labourers. These labourers or *karmakaras* were to be found in various spheres of production—in agriculture (on royal and private estates and in the village community), in artisans' workshops and in trading. The number of *karmakaras* swelled when it was time to sow the seed or gather in the crops, in other words, when labour was scarce. The *karmakaras* were to be found both in the villages and in the towns. As a rule they did not possess any means of production and hired themselves out for set wages, or in return for food.

The *karmakaras* worked both on the king's estates and in the private farms of the rich, tilling the fields and tending livestock; the village communities also had cause to resort to the assistance of hired labourers. They would work in the fields, execute irrigation projects or tend grazing livestock. A special overseer would allocate to such *karmakaras* as had worked in the king's estates implements and livestock.

The position of the hired labourers was extremely difficult, but those who worked on the king's estates were better provided for. To judge by evidence found in the *Arthashastra*, the *karmakaras* who tilled the land used to receive a tenth of the harvest, while those tending livestock would be given one-tenth of the butter and milk from the cows they herded. Although the *Arthashastra* laid down specific conditions for the conclusion of agreements concerning the implementation of work, in practice everything depended upon the employer or master. The food the *karmakaras* ate was not very different from that of the slaves. Their difficult position often led them to hire themselves out on almost any conditions. The *Arthashastra* tells how rural labourers gathered up cereal plants in the fields that had been left behind by the harvesters.

As far as their place in the *varna* pattern was concerned, hired labourers were usually ranked among the *shudras*, but it is possible that their number included free village farmers and artisans who though now impoverished actually belonged to the *vaishya* estate.

The Social Division and Caste System

During the Magadha and Mauryan periods not only had the *varna* and caste systems evolved, but it had also become a leading element in the structure of society. The division of society into *varnas* existed side by side with the fundamental division into classes.

In the *Majjhima-Nikaya*—part of the Buddhist canon—India is compared with neighbouring regions, including those populated by Greeks and Kambojas living in Arachosian territory. In those lands,

we are told, society consisted of freemen and slaves, while in Indian society there were also the four *varnas*.

Much of the data to be found in source materials shows that the *varna* a man belonged to determined to a large degree the place of the free Indian in society. However at that time property status as opposed to origins was coming to play a more and more important part. It is stressed that wealth brings man fame and respect.

Brahman and Buddhist texts present the overall pattern of the *varna* system in different ways: in Brahman writings it is the Brahmans who come first, then the *kshatriyas*, while in the Buddhist texts the Brahmans take second place to the *kshatriyas*. It is possible that the Buddhist texts not only reflect the Buddhist view of the *varna* system but also those changes that had by this time taken place within the pattern of social division.

An interesting view of the *varna* system under the Mauryan kings is provided in the writings of Megasthenes who himself was able to observe first-hand this system and the relations between representatives of the various *varnas*. Megasthenes divided the whole population of India into seven groups (parts): philosophers, farmers, herdsmen and hunters, artisans and traders, soldiers, overseers, councillors and assessors. Megasthenes based his classification on professional attributes, although representatives of all four *varnas* were included in his pattern. His list like those in the Brahman texts is headed by the Brahmans, which points to the fact that he is adhering to Brahman traditions.

During the reign of the Magadha and Mauryan kings the Brahmans retained their high position. Their influence was particularly strong in the sphere of ideology and religious practice. The main advisers at court and in the law-courts were also Brahmans. Many of them were very rich and owned large landed estates. The position of the Brahmans in Magadha and Kosala was relatively strong, since they owned large tracts of land there.

New conditions left their mark on the position of the Brahmans within the structure of the social hierarchy. They were obliged to change their traditional offices. Written sources of the period already contain mention of Brahman landowners, traders, artisans and servants. While in earlier Brahman sources the Brahmans were only allowed to take up farming and trade in extremely rare cases, now Brahman laws permitted members of that *varna* to take up the occupations of other *varnas*, the *kshatriyas* and *vaishyas*. Buddhist sources even mention Brahman servants, woodcutters, shepherds, poor peasants. They were evidently obliged to turn to occupations which they themselves regarded as unworthy of a Brahman in view of their difficult position. In such cases Brahmans were deprived of a privilege as significant as exemption from taxes.

Political power was in the hands of the *kshatriyas* whose influence was enhanced to a large degree after the strong Mauryan empire had been established. The kings as a rule were of *kshatriya* origin, and the army was in their hands. The power of the *kshatriyas* was particularly significant in the republics. In the Magadha and Mauryan times the *kshatriyas* also gained major economic privileges: many of them became owners of large estates. While previously the Brahmins had enjoyed unlimited power in the ideological sphere, now it was the *kshatriyas* who came to claim an independent role in that sphere.

Eminent political figures in ancient India came out in favour of an alliance of the *kshatriyas* and the Brahmins. The author of the *Arthashastra* wrote that the power of the *kshatriyas* guided by the Brahmins was invincible and would remain so forever. In many written sources the first two *varnas* were contrasted with the two lower ones. It became common practice to bracket together the *vaishyas* and *shudras* so to speak. At the same time the more prosperous *vaishyas* came to have more in common with the higher *varnas*, and the impoverished ones were in practical terms reduced to *shudra* status. These developments followed in the wake of the rise of trade and the handicrafts. The main occupations of the *vaishyas* were agriculture, the handicrafts and commerce. Theirs was the social group that bore the bulk of the tax burden, but among the rich *vaishyas* were powerful merchants known as *sethi*, money-lenders and landowners. During the Magadha and Mauryan periods the political role of the *vaishyas* was in decline, and they virtually lost their right to possess weapons.

The position of the *shudras* at this time remained virtually unchanged and only a few of them succeeded in attaining wealth through trade or craftsmanship which improved their status in society.

This was the picture proffered by the social structure in the monarchies of ancient India during the second half of the first millennium B.C. The social organisation of the republican states of the same period presented a somewhat different picture however. (See "The Republics of Ancient India".)

The Family and Forms of Marriage

In the Magadha and Mauryan age the main form of the family was the large patriarchal family. In several regions, apart from monogamous relationships, there were also more archaic forms of marriage to be found. The husband was the head of the family. Gradually certain changes came about in the position of women, who eventually became fully dependent upon their spouses and sons. Marriage was turned into a sort of property deal. The man purchased

his wife, as it were, and she became his chattel. Source materials tell of wives being sold or lost in the course of gambling.

The woman's position was an extremely hard one. In childhood she was expected to be completely in the power of her father, during her youth in that of her husband, and after the death of her husband in the power of her sons: this is how a woman's lot is described in the *Manava Dharmashastra*. Wives are to be patient even unto death and strictly observe their obligations. The *Manava Dharmashastra* demanded that a wife respect her husband as a god, even if he possessed no virtues. Only husbands were able to divorce their spouses. A wife was unable to abandon her family. Even if her husband sold her or left her she would still be regarded as his wife. An unfaithful wife would be subjected to most terrible punishments, including death. A man could have several wives and this would not be considered a sinful action. According to tradition, a wife had to belong to the same *varna* as her husband. Only in rare cases were men allowed to marry a wife from a lower *varna*, but a woman from a high *varna* was forbidden to marry a man from a lower *varna*. The most serious crime of all was held to be the marriage between a *shudra* and a Brahman woman. A father's power over his children was decisive and final. In the Brahman "laws" it was stated outright that a father could give his children away if he so desired.

The *Shastras* list eight forms of marriage, but it is difficult to say to what extent they were all actually spread. These forms were as follows: the giving of a daughter (the Brahma marriage), the giving of a daughter to a priest (the *Daiva* marriage), the purchasing of a bride for a cow or bull (the *Arsha* marriage), marriage on equal terms (the Prajapatya marriage), the purchasing of a bride at an agreed bride-price (the *Asura* marriage), the abduction of a bride (the *Rakshasa* marriage), the seizing of a bride by force while she is asleep (the *Paishacha* marriage), and the voluntary union (the *Gandharva* marriage).

To judge by later sources extremely archaic customs inherited from the past were to predominate in marriage and family relations over a very long period. In accordance with the Brahman "laws" or *Shastras*, for instance, if a husband died without leaving any children, his wife, if her husband's relatives so demanded, was obliged to bear children by her husband's brother or other close relative.

These rules can be traced back to ancient practices linked with the principle of preserving clan property. Marriages between blood relatives were forbidden up to and including those seven times removed.

THE REPUBLICS OF ANCIENT INDIA

Ganas and Sanghas

In the history of ancient India in the Magadha and Mauryan times the republican unions, indicated by the terms *gana* and *sangha* in Indian sources, played a considerable role. These unions waged a resolute struggle against the monarchies and on a number of occasions secured impressive victories. Buddhist sources even list some republican states among the "great lands".

The term *gana* embraces a multitude of meanings. During the Vedic age it was used to denote tribal formations; later *ganas* and *sanghas* came to be understood as unions of a non-monarchical type at a different level of development. The grammarian Panini (fifth and fourth centuries B.C.) refers to several types of *sanghas*: *sanghas* living by force of arms, namely military associations, and *sanghas* where the development of statehood had reached an extremely advanced stage. In various Buddhist writings a distinction is drawn between two types of state, namely monarchies ruled over by one man or lands ruled over by a *gana*. While in states of the first type all power was centred in the hands of one man, in the *ganas* (as is pointed out in one of the texts in question) even a decision taken by ten men might be reviewed by twenty, i. e., depend upon the opinion of the majority. It is significant that the ancient Indians did not consider the *gana* as the ruling authority with a monarch absent merely temporarily. Moreover they contrasted these two forms of power—the monarchy and the republic—pointing out that in their respective lands both the king and the *gana* possessed exclusive authority as the wielders of supreme power.

Classical authors—men who had taken part in Alexander's campaign and the ambassador Megasthenes—had been aware of the existence of unions that were not monarchies. Unions that in Indian sources were included in the group of *ganas* or *sanghas* were referred to as autonomous and independent. These unions had no royal power, and their leader was elected.

Both classical and Indian sources depict these non-monarchical unions as flourishing lands with a smoothly running system of administration and a high level of culture.

The System of Administration

The most advanced of the *ganas* and the *sanghas* during the Mauryan period were states where there was no monarch with undivided power, that is they were, in other words, republics, although the forms of republican rule within them were not always the

same. The feature common to these republics was the absence of a hereditary ruler with undivided power. The head of state was usually elected (or appointed) by the *gana*, and when necessary he could be replaced by the *gana*. The Buddhist work *Chivaravastu* contains a very interesting description of the *gana* of the Lichchhavis, one of the most powerful republican states in Northern India. It tells how the head of the *gana* was elected after the death of the leader. The main condition was that the candidate should be a man of merit. The *gana* appointed a candidate declaring that it reserved the right to remove him if he did not gain the *gana*'s approval for his actions. The leader of the *gana* enjoyed mainly executive power, while legislative power was the domain of the *gana* in its capacity as the supreme organ of power (thus it can be seen that the *gana* was regarded both as a state with a non-monarchical system of government, and as the state's supreme organ of power).

The *gana* adopted major decisions in the form of resolutions obligatory for all citizens including the most influential among their number. Whoever presumed to break those laws was punished with a severe fine. On occasions the offender was even given the death penalty. The *gana* appointed its own officials who were regarded as its representatives.

In certain republics the *gana* constituted a kind of popular assembly for all free citizens enjoying full rights. When decisions were taken these were determined by the opinion of the majority. The composition of the *gana* and its role as the supreme organ of power determined to a large extent the nature of those republican states. In those instances when the popular assembly retained its leading role and was made up of citizens enjoying full rights the republic might be termed democratic, although even in these cases the council of the nobility began to gain in importance. Certain political unions represented a transitional form of state from a democratic to an aristocratic republic. In other cases, where the popular assembly had already lost its dominant importance and real power was concentrated in the hands of the aristocratic council of the *kshatriyas*, the republics were of an aristocratic type.

The Power of the *Kshatriyas* and the Social Structure

In the *ganas* and the *sanghas* the *kshatriyas* formed the dominant stratum of society, separate from the rest of the population. This explains why many of the non-monarchical unions were referred to as *kshatriyan*. In the aristocratic republics a special status was enjoyed by the wealthier and more influential *kshatriyas* who bore the title of *raja*. In order to attain this title a man had to go through a special ceremony of initiation in a holy pool. Any illegal performance of this rite was subject to death penalty, even for a *kshatriya*.

The *kshatriyas* who possessed the title *raja* met in a special hall—the *santhagara*—where they deliberated the most important questions of administration. Representatives of other *varnas*, even the Brahmans, were not allowed to be present at these meetings. It is most probable that in some republics the deliberation of various questions began in the popular assembly and then the council of *rajas* would make their final decision. The relations between these two institutions depended entirely on the nature of the power in the republic concerned. Dignitaries of state too were evidently appointed from the ranks of the *kshatriyas*—army commanders, judges, etc.

Practices inherited from the age of tribal or clan relations were still very strong within the social structure of the *ganas* and *sanghas*, even in the most advanced among them. For example, the influence of the *gotra* (or clan) still made itself felt, although the *kula* (or family) was now emerging as the main unit.

A highly distinctive feature of the *ganas* and *sanghas* was the pattern of *varna* and caste division. In this respect the *kshatriyas* were set apart from the rest of the population, and even the Brahmans could achieve a position equal to theirs only in extremely rare cases. While in the monarchies it was above all the Brahmans who owned large landed estates, in the republics the *kshatriyas* established themselves as influential landowners. They also held most of the political power. Here the Brahmans were unable to claim priority, as they did in the monarchies, and often they were reduced to a status that came close to that of the privileged group of *vaishyas*. Despite specific features of the *varna* structure, in the republics as in the monarchies the most oppressed *varna* was that of the *shudras*. This shows that the form of political power did not determine the social structure.

The all-important characteristic of the political organisation to be found in the *ganas* and *sanghas*, which distinguished them from the monarchies, was that broad strata of the population were involved in political affairs, a fact which made them firm and durable unions. The author of the *Arthashastra* held that the *sanghas* were invincible due to their cohesion. Despite a certain degree of democratism the republics constituted societies with acute class, ownership and social contradictions. Written sources refer to the clashes between the influential, i.e., the *kshatriya* members, and the common members of the *ganas* and *sanghas*. The *Mahabharata* calls the internal contradictions the main enemy of the *ganas* and *sanghas*. In the Buddhist canon there is even mention of an open revolt of the slaves in the republic of the Shakyas.

The ancient Indian republics survived the age of the Mauryans and continued to exist right up until the era of the Guptas, when gradually they began to lose their independence and were subdued by monarchies. Study of the republican systems of ancient India reveals that it is ill-advised to contrast the political systems of ancient India

and the Mediterranean countries in classical times. In India, as also in the classical civilisations, a similar process of development was to be observed, from a classless society to a state; in this context a state could adopt either a monarchical or republican form of government depending upon a whole range of conditions.

THE CULTURE OF THE MAURYAN ERA

The Spread of Writing

The age of the Magadha and Mauryan kings was a period of rapid cultural development. To judge by the Ashokan inscriptions found in many regions of India, and also in the territory of modern Afghanistan, writing was fairly widespread as early as the third century B.C. However, there is little doubt that it existed several centuries earlier as well. In many Buddhist writings there are references to an exchange of letters, to the recording of royal decrees, to scribes and the study in schools of the art of writing alongside with arithmetic.

In Panini's grammar there are special terms to denote script and scribes, and also references to the Greek script. Ashokan inscriptions were in the Brahmi script, and also in the Aramaic, Greek, and Kharoshthi scripts, the latter having evolved from Aramaic under the influence of Brahmi. Most of the inscriptions however were in Brahmi. According to reports by Nearchus, the ancient Indians at the period of Alexander's Indian campaign wrote on cotton fabric. It is possible that the most widespread material for writing on was palm leaves but because of the damp climate those written sources have not been preserved. The only testimony to the epistolary art of that era is provided by the Ashokan edicts inscribed on rock, pillars and cave walls. By the third century B.C. Brahmi was already a script with a long history behind it.

There is no consensus of opinion among the experts as to the origins of the Brahmi script. It was regarded as linked with the script of the Harappan civilisation, with the Semitic script, with that used in Southern Arabia, and even Greek. Inscriptions dating from the second century B.C. show that there were several versions of the Brahmi script at that period. In the Buddhist writing, *Lalitavistara*, that dates from the beginning of the first century A.D. and tells of the life of Buddha, sixty-four different types of script are mentioned, which include local Indian scripts and foreign ones as well. Ashoka's edicts were addressed not only to state officials, but also to the common people—representatives of the various social groups who were expected to be able to read his decrees. Among the inscriptions of the second and first centuries B.C. a considerable number are dedications, providing, as it were, a register of the gifts offered to the Buddhist *sangha*. These inscriptions were made on behalf of traders, Buddhist monks, artisans, etc. All this points to the fact that

the ancient Indians of the third, second and first centuries B.C. were to a large extent familiar with the written word. It should however not be forgotten that the system of education in ancient India was based on an oral tradition, on the learning by heart of sacred texts, which were passed down from generation to generation.

The Growth of Scientific Knowledge

The Magadha and Mauryan age was notable for a marked advance in scientific knowledge. It was at this time that many scientific treatises were created relating to astronomy, mathematics, medicine and grammar, although they were actually written down later. An enormous number of religious writings by Buddhists and Jainas also date from this period. Modern scholars also regard the life and writings of the famous Indian grammarian Panini, who compiled a detailed grammar of Sanskrit, as dating from the fifth or fourth centuries B.C. His work was entitled *Ashtadhyayi* (Eight Chapters). The methods used to analyse language were of a very high calibre. Panini based himself on the works of certain predecessors, whose names are mentioned in his grammar. This grammar became, as it were, a yardstick for later Sanskrit grammarians, who always made a thorough analysis of it and commented on it in detail. In the fourth century B.C., a commentary on it was written by Katyayana, and in the second century B.C. Patanjali wrote a new Sanskrit grammar. Both of them were familiar not only with Sanskrit but also with local dialects.

During the reign of the Magadha and Mauryan kings Prakrit also became widespread: it was in this language that Ashoka's edicts were written and various other inscriptions compiled. There already existed several dialects. It is in one of these—Pali—that the Buddhist canon has come down to us. According to tradition it was written down on the island of Sri Lanka in the year 80 B.C. In his grammar Patanjali mentions works written in Prakrit. At that time there already existed poetic texts, known in Indian literature as *kavya*, and certain Sanskrit writings on politics and morals (the *Shastras*).

Material found in the writings of Panini and Patanjali give grounds for the assumption that there also existed dramatic works at this time. In Patanjali's grammar there are references to actors, the stage, musical instruments, etc.

Architecture and Sculpture

Most of the buildings dating from the Magadha and Mauryan periods were made of wood, and for this reason only fragments of them have been preserved to the present day. Yet gradually stone

came to be used as well. Excavations at the site of ancient Pataliputra led to the discovery of parts of the royal palace and the hall of the Hundred Pillars. In addition to such secular buildings religious edifices of this period are also of major interest, in particular the Buddhist *stupas* at Sanchi and Bharhut dating from approximately the third and second centuries B.C.

During the Mauryan period local schools of sculpture grew up among which the most notable were the north-western one centred in Taxila and the eastern one with its centre in Tosali. A high degree of mastery is to be found in the capitals decorating the pillars on which Ashoka's edicts are inscribed. The culture of the Mauryan period, particularly that of the north-western regions, reflects a certain influence of Achaemenid culture, but in general ancient Indian culture of that period was profoundly national and original, a culture that had grown up on a foundation of local tradition.

Political Ideas

The second half of the first millennium B.C. was an extremely important stage in the development of political organisation and statehood in ancient India. This period is linked with the formation of the first large states in the Ganges valley, and later of the united empire. Principles of administration and theories of state power were being elaborated; political schools and political treatises started to appear. Of particular interest is the treatise *Arthashastra*, traditionally held to be the work of Kautilya, the chief dignitary in the service of the Mauryan king, Chandragupta. For the most part this political work appears to have been compiled in the early years of our era, but the ideas and principles of state policy expounded in it reflect the spirit of the Mauryan age.

During the Magadha and Mauryan times there existed republican states alongside the monarchies, although the monarchy was the most widespread form of state power at the time. The ancient Indians themselves held that the state had not always existed but had come into being (thanks to the gods' help) in order that law and order might reign among men, since the stronger among them, like so many fish, had started to devour the small fry. Kautilya, author of the *Arthashastra*, believed that a most important task of the state was to uphold the social division, the hierarchy based on the four *varnas*. The king had to defend his subjects, and therefore it was his function to administer punishment. Indeed, the very science of state administration was known as the science of punishment. Kautilya cites the idea propounded by ancient authorities to the effect that punishment is the best means through which to govern men.

The politicians of those days considered that the most dangerous form of unrest was internal unrest and Kautilya declared directly,

addressing the king, that internal unrest is more terrible than unrest from without, since it gives rise to a general spirit of mistrust even at court and among the king's retinue. Special attention was focussed on the secret service and application of secret tactics in politics. Kautilya advised the king to offer his officials bribes, send spies to them, sow discord among the officials of state and use not just open but also secret punishments both for his supporters as well as his enemies.

It was practical interests that Kautilya put before all else. Starting out from this principle he even tolerated deviations from the established norms laid down in the *Shastras*. As he saw it, if a law contradicted governmental instructions, then preference should be given to the latter.

Kautilya advised the king, when he found himself in a difficult financial position, to confiscate property from the temples and thus replenish his treasury. Kautilya even elaborated certain methods which could be used by the king to turn his people's superstition to his own advantage and to convince them that their ruler possessed magical powers.

In this period various methods were elaborated for establishing relations between states, for conducting war and peace negotiations. One of the most important issues was that of foreign policy. The *Arthashastra* expounds six principal methods of foreign policy: peace, war, watching and waiting, offensive, searching for means of defence and double-faced policy. Special attention is paid to the activity of ambassadors, whose range of duties was extremely wide. Apart from observance of treaties and maintenance of the prestige of his state Kautilya considered an ambassador obliged to provoke disputes between allies, instigate secret intrigue, effect surreptitious transfer of troops, i.e., use all possible means of action available. Methods for waging strife against neighbouring states were also elaborated in detail, for such states were usually regarded as enemies. The neighbour of a neighbour would be seen as friend, but the neighbour of that friend as another enemy. When writing about the most advantageous situation for an attack Kautilya advised that account be taken of the financial position of the potential enemy and the ruler's relations with his subjects. His principle was that if subjects were stirring against their ruler, then they might bring about his downfall, even if he appeared powerful. For this reason it was important to come out against precisely that ruler whose subjects were hostile to him.

Major achievements in the political theory of ancient India were a direct result of advance in scientific knowledge and overall progress in the development of society.

It is revealing to note that Kautilya held the four major fields of knowledge to be philosophy (*anvikshiki*), "the teaching on the *Vedas*", the teaching on the economy, and the teaching on state administration (*dandaniti*). Nor is it any mere accident that he placed

philosophy first among the major sciences. Kautilya mentioned three philosophical systems—Lokayata, Sankhya, Yoga. Knowledge of philosophy, according to Kautilya, ensured success in the running of state affairs.

The wide range of ideas investigated and the depth of their analysis place the political science of ancient India on a par with that of ancient Greece, and Kautilya on a par with one of the greatest thinkers of antiquity, Aristotle.

RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS OF THE MAURYAN PERIOD

The middle of the first millennium B.C. was a time of searching and reform in matters of religion and philosophy in ancient India. Vedism as a religion had, to a certain extent, lost its influence. The primitive character of its mythological concepts, its intricate and archaic ritual, the crude material claims of the priests, whom many had ceased to regard as the bearers of any superior wisdom, were all out of step with the spirit of the new age and gave rise to protest. The first attempt to surmount this crisis was a movement which found reflection in the *Upanishads*. This movement as a whole, however, did not reject Vedism, but strove to inject it with new life on a new, theoretically sounder basis. Upholders of orthodox traditions waged a hard struggle against all other trends and systems that had embodied new principles consistently and with firm resolve. Tradition called the latter unorthodox (i.e., rejecting the authority of the *Vedas*) and included among them two new religions that had emerged by this time, namely Jainism and Buddhism, and also all those schools of thought which gave expression to the materialist trend in Indian philosophy. All these teachings came out openly against the immutable significance of the Vedic texts.

Between the early *Upanishads* and the appearance of new religious and philosophical systems, essentially independent of Brahmanism, there was a period marked by intensive spiritual searching. A large number of ascetics, who had broken their ties with ordinary everyday life and old traditions, emerged as the harbingers of these new ideas. They were known as *parivrajakas* (literally, wanderers or pilgrims) and *shramanas*. (Later the term *shramana* came to denote ascetics adhering to unorthodox movements or sects.) Initially these *shramanas* did not set up their own communes and schools, but later faithful followers started to gather round the more celebrated of the "wanderers".

At this period of intellectual ferment a large number of new teachings and trends emerged, many ideas of which were later taken up and elaborated by the founders of the main reform doctrines. All the early *shramana* schools refused to accept the authority of the *Vedas* and the ideological and social norms based on the latter. This,

naturally, led to categorical rejection of the claims of the Brahmins to the role of unique bearers of the "supreme truth", an understanding of which was considered to be beyond the reach of the ordinary mortal. The ideological privileges of the Brahmins also served to justify their role as the highest *varna* in Vedic society; it was quite natural therefore that the *shramanas*, who in the vast majority of cases were representatives of the other *varnas*, rejected the social claims of the priesthood with great consistency.

Another essential feature of all the doctrines put forward by the *shramanas* was the profoundness of their approach to ethical problems. Rejecting the traditional social order based on the *varna*, which had been proclaimed and elaborated in Vedic literature, they had to approach in a new way the question as to man's place in Nature and in society. Theoretical activity in this direction varied in intensity from one reform school to another. However there is no doubt that the detailed elaboration of ethical problems by the Jainas and Buddhists was not merely a characteristic feature of those two movements; rather it served to express the searching for new standards of behaviour, which was characteristic of all unorthodox teachings in that period.

The social aspect of the *shramana* ascetic schools constituted a significant phenomenon of Indian history. The *shramana* teachers themselves did not proclaim any particular social programme, however many of their ideas and in particular their irreconcilable opposition to a "Brahman India" made them potential allies of the rulers of early Indian states in their struggle against tribal disunity, which was sanctified by Brahman teaching. The process of centralisation in Indian political life coincided with the emergence of unifying tendencies within spiritual life and this was no accident, for a large number of separate, independent teachers were giving way to a small number of religious schools enjoying recognition throughout India.

Some of the religious schools were not significant for the whole country, yet they all exerted a considerable influence upon the development of ideas and conceptions that held sway in that and subsequent eras. Buddhist tradition lists the names of six "heretical" teachers with whom the Buddhists engaged in fierce dispute. Among these were the founders of two highly important religious and philosophical schools—Jainism and Ajivikism.

Jainism

One of the earliest unorthodox religions in India was Jainism. The date of the birth of this religion and the name of its founder have been handed down to us by ancient tradition. Its founder was Vardhamana, a *kshatriya* from Videha (modern Bihar), who lived in the sixth

century B.C. At the age of twenty-eight he left his father's house and wandered off into the forest where he devoted himself to ascetic life and meditation (to the ancient Indians the link between mortification of the flesh and through this a shedding of ordinary human interests and weaknesses on the one hand, and the enhancement of man's capacity for mental concentration on the other, appeared self-evident). After twelve years' asceticism the principles of a new teaching had taken shape in his mind which he then proceeded to propagate in various parts of India, collecting as he did so large numbers of disciples. Vardhamana lived to over eighty: initially his teaching took root only in Bihar, where he had influential patrons, but later centres of his teaching grew up in the most remote regions of India. The founder of the new teaching came to be known as Mahavira (the Great Hero) or Jina (the Conqueror); these honorary titles were often bestowed on specially venerated religious teachers (indeed, the name of this teaching, Jainism, is a derivative of the second epithet, in other words the teaching of Jina). In addition to the adherents of the new religion who led a monastic life, many laymen soon swelled the ranks of Mahavira's followers. These lay members did not renounce property or family, but observed specific rituals laid down in Jaina teaching. Later Jainism was to become a significant factor not only in India's cultural life but in the country's social life as well.*

The essence of the teaching proclaimed by Jina (and elaborated by his closest followers) is expounded in the early Jaina writings. The basis for man's comprehension of the world is presented as man's direct knowledge of things received via the senses (as is also the case in other teachings appearing at the time); indeed this particular kind of realism is intrinsic to the majority of teachings evolved in ancient times (and not only in India). Jaina teaching does not present the material and the spiritual as opposites: man's ability to feel and to think is as natural a manifestation of life as the processes at work in the natural world that surrounds man. At first glance this principle might be seen in part as a step in a materialist direction, but only in part, since Jainism consistently develops the two possibilities for logical interpretation inherent in it. It not only "materialises" the spiritual, but also "spiritualises" the material. The archaic concept of the soul is carried to its extreme conclusion in this teaching. The soul is present in all things; plants and even stones are seen to have a soul. Souls are eternal and were not created by the gods.

* According to the beliefs of the Jainas themselves (this was how the followers of Vardhamana—*Jina*—referred to themselves), their teaching can be traced back to the depths of time. They provide names of twenty-four teachers—so-called *tirthankaras* (ford-markers across the stream of existence) and Vardhamana is only last in this list. In reality however all the main principles of the new faith are linked with Vardhamana's name (or are traceable to a still later period). Stories of the *tirthankaras* constitute a mixture of myth, legend and reminiscences of certain earlier attempts at religious reform.—*Auth.*

In addition to data gleaned from immediate experience the Jainas accepted as equally valid categories stemming from the concepts propounded in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*: they believed, for instance, in reincarnation and in the law of *Karma* that determines the new embodiment of a being in accordance with his former deeds.

The acceptance by the Jainas of the fact that all phenomena of Nature are animate accords most happily with this view and all dividing lines between various species of creatures disappear: a human being can turn into a stone, while a stone might even attain the human state. The law of *Karma* determines the position of the soul which might appear at an animal, human, divine or infernal level.

Like most ancient Indian religious teachings, Jainism saw its fundamental aim not as the attainment of knowledge as such, but the elaboration of prescriptions and norms which might help man in the practical achievement of his religious ideal. As in the *Upanishads*, so too in Jainist teaching, it is envisaged in "ultimate liberation", that is, surmounting all passions and earthly ties and in a state where being dissolves into the impersonal, universal whole. When this state is attained by man, he emerges from subjugation to all natural laws of existence and shall never be reborn again. This "liberated" being is superior to all else in the world, he surpasses the gods, since they too are subject to the law of *Karma*. Men, and in particular *arhants* (i.e., those who have achieved full holiness), stand higher than the gods, because the gods cannot achieve the state of *arhantship*. In order to liberate himself a god needs to be reborn among men, in the world of men. The "path to liberation" lies via extraordinarily rigorous asceticism, abstinence and self-mortification.

The only serious schism in the history of Jainism was connected precisely with the practice of asceticism: the *Shvetambaras* or White-Clad sect was criticised by the more orthodox group that rejected clothes altogether. Adherents of the latter group were known as the *Digambaras* or Sky-Clad sect.

Only the soul of an ascetic could achieve "liberation", not that of a layman. It is no accident that asceticism was practised on a far wider scale by the Jainas than by the adherents of other religions of ancient India. Even the title of Mahavira—Jina or the Conqueror—was associated with victory over a series of reincarnations, over earthly feelings and possessed ascetic implications.

The essential feature and main principle of Jainist ethics is *ahimsa* (non-violence in relation to living creatures). The Jainist monk not only refrained from killing animals but also went to great lengths to avoid accidentally crushing even the tiniest of insects. Rules of behaviour for monks were later elaborated in great detail and recorded in Jainist texts. They were obliged to observe twenty-eight rules of conduct, which included truthfulness, restraint, a strict ban on theft, etc. These rules were less stringent and less numerous for the lay followers of Jainism.

Soon Jainism became widespread in the country, however it did not prove a viable rival of Buddhism or Hinduism. It went into an unmistakable decline in the first centuries A.D., although within a small enclosed community it has been preserved in India up until the present day. Yet the influence of Jainism on Indian culture of the ancient times and that of the Middle Ages was considerable. Jainism inspired an extensive literature, and the realism intrinsic in its philosophy gave rise to the Jainas' interest in various fields of science. The contribution of the Jainas to the domain of scientific achievement was very significant.

Early Buddhism: the Fundamentals of the Buddhist Doctrine

Buddhism like other religious reform teachings was propagated most widely of all in Northern India, and in particular in Magadha, which was seen as the centre of unorthodox teachings, as a kingdom which had been most reluctant to accept Brahmanism. The unorthodox or so-called heretical schools of thought had many common features, despite the fact that there also existed considerable differences between them. Initially Buddhism did not exert any special influence and was merely one of the unorthodox schools of thought anxious to secure support from the powerful states of the sub-continent and in particular that of the rulers of Magadha.

This new teaching that rejected rigid caste barriers and supported equality of all men regardless of their origin was particularly attractive to the mercantile strata of society, the more prosperous among the *vaishyas*, whom Brahmanism granted only a most modest place in the social hierarchy. Buddhism also proved popular among the *kshatriyas*. At the time they were concentrating more and more power in their own hands, yet were aware of the strong ideological pressures to which they were subjected by the Brahmins, who proclaimed themselves the highest and only sanctified *varna* or even terrestrial gods.

Free representatives of all *varnas* were admitted to the Buddhist community or *sangha*, and this considerably widened the new teaching's sphere of influence. For those who did not join the *sangha* the hope of *svarga* was still open—the ideal which Buddha presented to the layman. In its early period the ethical aspect of Buddhism was pre-eminent; Buddha did not elucidate complex metaphysical questions in his teachings to laymen.

The success of Buddhism in its initial phase can be explained to a large degree by the fact that Buddha in his teachings did not call for a rejection of all old traditions and customs, which had taken firm root in both the social and intellectual life of an ancient and conservative society, but rather attempted to come forward with a new interpretation, give his own explanation for many of the established norms.

Buddhism was an essentially original teaching. The degree to which it differed from other Indian religious teachings was so great that on several occasions attempts were made to liken it to other religions that had emerged beyond the borders of India, for example with Christianity. However the total range of innovations involved was carefully included within the framework of general traditional concepts, which Buddhism had never totally rejected.

It is not for nothing that scholars trace a link between Buddhism and the *Upanishads*. This does not however imply that Buddha shared the principles inherent in the teaching of the *Upanishads*. It would be more correct to assume that the *Upanishads* themselves reflected certain new concepts that emerged as the society of ancient India and the culture of its various regions developed.

The similarities between Buddhism and Brahmanism can be put down to various factors, however it is most significant that after the appearance of Buddhism and other reform schools of thought the traditional religion of the Indians that had been handed down over centuries did not undergo any essential changes. Buddhism like Jainism took over the traditional Indian rituals that had been sanctified by Brahmanism. For this very reason the Vedic and Brahman gods were not anathematised.

Buddhism did not reject the traditional Indian divinities, but it allotted to them such an insignificant place within its own system, that after being absorbed into Buddhism they were eventually to disappear, as it were. This incorporation of Brahmanic divinities into Buddhism undoubtedly made it far more popular among the peoples in the various regions of the country, yet Buddhism itself through absorption of these beliefs risked being swallowed up by them. If we take the early development of Buddhist doctrine it can be seen that at that time veneration of the Vedic gods was not detrimental to the distinctive essence or independence of the new religion in the framework of which it was practised. The essential feature of Buddhism (as indeed of the ideology found in the *Upanishads*) was indifference to concrete forms of worship.

Buddhism, like the teaching in the *Upanishads*, recognises reincarnation and the doctrine of *Karma*. While rejecting the idea of the soul as an indestructible entity Buddhism categorically asserts that spiritual energy is indestructible. No manifestation of that energy can be reduced to nothing. It is merely a moment of that continuous process of transformation taken in isolation. This idea of the eternal nature of all that is spiritual gives rise to the doctrine of *Karma*. Since action does not disappear, sooner or later it will manifest itself in its inevitable consequences. Since it is a spiritual act by its very nature, it is not fettered by the life of the body: a new incarnation is thus predetermined by former deeds, or is at least subject to their all-important influence.

In a commentary on Buddhist teaching Academician Shcherbatskoy wrote: "Being ... is a continuous process of minute-by-minute birth and disappearance. This process is subject to the law of causality.... Not only is there nothing eternal, but there is no lasting being at all; hence there are no substances either spiritual or material."*

Buddha regarded everything in the world as being in a state of constant change. The *dharmas* (particles man cannot cognize), which as a result of various combinations constitute material and spiritual elements, are in constant movement, are an endless pattern of combinations.

The corner-stone of Buddhism is of course the teaching concerning the Four Noble Truths, which according to tradition were expounded by Buddha in his first sermon. In his exposition of these "truths" Buddha defines the nature of human existence, the causes of human suffering and charts out the path to salvation. When viewed as a whole it is clear that the essence of this central sermon of Buddha was subordinated to this idea of the path of salvation. Buddha is traditionally purported to have stated that just as the water of the oceans has a salt taste, so his teaching has no more than a "taste of salvation". Buddha represented life in terms of suffering, which results from desires and striving after earthly existence and its pleasures. This is what led him to urge men to renounce desires and to point out to them the path of salvation. This involved turning one's back on the law of *Karma* and wresting oneself out of the circle of reincarnations, into which man falls as a result of his not knowing the truth. He who enters a *sangha* can attain *nirvana*, if he sets himself free from the fetters of earthly life, of all forms of suffering and passions, subdues his ego and surmounts the dualism of body and spirit.

In the state of *nirvana*, according to the Buddhist teaching, the constantly changing *dharmas* cease to move, and hence so does the flow of new combinations. There ensues a complete break with the *samsara*—the transition from one bodily form to another, a break with the world of substances. *Nirvana*, the attainment of which was linked with the disappearance of the chain of subsequent reincarnations, was seen as the supreme goal, towards which the faithful aspired. The ideal model was the *arhant*—the holy man who had attained the state of *nirvana* through his deeds and his striving after spiritual perfection.

It is no accident that the ethical aspect of Buddhism was accorded such enormous importance. The moral side of man's behaviour was bound to occupy a special place. The Buddha called upon men to follow the Eightfold Path: right views, right conduct, right effort, right speech, right meditation, etc. It was these principles that

* F. I. Shcherbatskoy, *The Theory of Knowledge and Logic as Presented in the Teachings of the Later Buddhists*, St Petersburg, 1909, Part II, pp. 117-18 (in Russian).

determined the essence of Buddhist morality. Man, in his rightful pursuance of this rightful path should, according to Buddha's teaching, rely on himself and not search protection, help and salvation from outside. It is on his own that man perpetrates evil, it is on his own that man degrades himself, we are told in the *Dhammapada*. It is on his own that he does not perpetrate evil as well, and it is on his own that he purifies himself. One man cannot purify another.

The Buddhists did not regard as essential the existence of God the Creator, who brings forth everything in the world, including man, God on whom man's destiny depends. Buddha is reputed to have said that for men who believe in a god such as that there exist no desires, no effort, no need to do anything, or abstain from doing it. According to Brahmanism on the other hand, man's life and his destiny are determined completely by the will of the gods, who shape man's intentions and destinies.

Despite the fact that Buddhism put forward ideas relating to the universal equality of men at birth, and to the specific nature of the *sangha*, Buddhism was not in any way a radical social movement. The cause of all worldly burdens, earthly suffering, and social injustice was presented in Buddhist sermons as the result of man's own "blindness" and explained in terms of man's incapacity to renounce worldly desires. According to the Buddhist teaching surmounting earthly suffering needed to be done not by means of struggle, but on the contrary through extinguishing all reactions to the world, through annihilation of man's awareness of his ego.

The word *Buddha* means "the Enlightened One" or "He who has perceived the truth". It was thus, in accordance with tradition, that Siddhartha Gautama came to be called after he "attained enlightenment" while sitting under a tree near the town of Gaya. Siddhartha was the son of the chief of the powerful Shakya tribe, but having renounced his wealth and the joys of a worldly life he became a hermit. Early Buddhist texts that have been preserved contain many references to the life of the founder of the Buddhist teaching. Of particular interest are the epigraphic materials dating from the fourth and third centuries B.C., which not only refer to Buddha but also specify his birthplace (Lumbini), a detail which coincides with the data provided in the religious texts.

Fierce controversy rages among contemporary scholars as to the historical authenticity of Buddha: attempts are being made to restore the original teaching propagated by Buddha himself. These questions are exceedingly complex, especially if we take into account that the canonical texts at the disposal of the present-day scholar date from approximately the third century B.C. (they are traditionally held to have been written down in Sri Lanka in the year 80 B.C.), i.e., several hundred years after the death of the founder of the doctrine. At the present time the most commonly accepted date for his death is 483 B.C. (and that for his birth 563 B.C.).

The Teaching of the Ajivikas

In the early days the Buddhists' main rivals were the Ajivikas. The considerable popularity enjoyed by Ajivikism between the fifth and third centuries B.C. can be explained above all by its consistent and radical criticism of Brahmanism, propagated by Gosala, the founder of Ajivikism. Dissatisfaction with the social order defended by the Brahmans enhanced the prestige of reform teachings in the widest social strata. Criticism of the caste structure and the Brahmans' interpretation of the *Karma* doctrine, propounded by Gosala, attracted not only the lower strata of society but also those with newly acquired wealth, men of humble origin, sons of artisans or traders. Right from the outset Gosala did not restrict his teaching to the narrow horizons of any monastic group, but rather turned to the world of laymen. The outward simplicity of his doctrine (the reduction of all categories in the last analysis to all-embracing predetermination—*niyati*—and to the fatalism which stems from such predetermination) also added to its popularity in large sections of the population which had continued (even after they adopted the Ajivikas' beliefs) adhering in their everyday lives to familiar rituals and accepting many traditional views of the world, etc. In its early stages (the fifth century B.C.) the Ajivikas appeared to have had more followers than the Buddhists. This was probably linked with their undisguised emphasis on social reform. It is quite natural, as tradition asserts, that not only representatives of rich trading circles and artisans should have numbered among the followers of Ajivikism, but that it should also have been popular with the lower strata, particularly the potters. This would appear to link up with the statement in the *Vayu Purana* (a writing that was finally compiled some time between the third and sixth centuries A.D. but which refers back to an earlier tradition) that the followers of the Ajivikas were *shudras*, men of different castes, or even untouchables. Buddhists and Ajivikas actively competed with each other in winning new followers. It is therefore not surprising that the Buddhist *sutras* criticised Gosala and his teaching in exceptionally harsh terms. Theoretical disputes sometimes degenerated into open clashes. The well-known Buddhist author Buddhaghosha relates the story of a rich money-lender by the name of Migara—an inhabitant of Shravasti, the capital of Koshala—who for a long time was a patron of the Ajivikas and bestowed rich offerings on their community. However when Migara decided to adopt Buddhism the Ajivikas, who had been favoured by him, literally laid siege to his house, fearing evidently not so much the loss of one of their fellow-believers, but rather the loss of material support which he had been rendering them with unflinching regularity.

In the *Pali Canon* Gosala is compared with a fisherman, who, by laying his net at the mouth of a river, causes the demise of a multitude

of fish (i.e., leads off many of those who might otherwise have swelled the ranks of the Buddhist camp), and this is a clear pointer not only to the rivalry between two religious doctrines, but also to the considerable popularity of the Ajivikas at the time.

While in the fifth century B.C. the Ajivikas enjoyed considerable influence, more than the Buddhists or the Jainas, later this rivalry was to end in a victory of the Buddhists. One of the reasons for this appeared to be a certain one-sidedness of the Ajivikas' teaching. Though the Ajivikas rejected the traditional Brahman set of views they did not come forward with any positive answer to the main questions of concern to the people of that age to counter the Brahman ideas, as did Buddhism. Man's purpose, his place in the world and in society, the value of individual effort and the principles on which "correct conduct" should be based were not really discussed in Gosala's teaching, although they had proved of so much interest to the Buddhists and Jainas. The "universal predetermination" proclaimed by this teaching excluded in principle any consideration of all these questions.

Religio-Philosophical Currents and the Records of Megasthenes

Important material on religious life in the Magadha and Mauryan kingdoms is provided by the Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes. Megasthenes and the classical writers that came after him drew apt distinctions between orthodox and unorthodox trends, dividing the ancient Indian "philosophers" into Brahmins and *shramanas*.

Close parallels with Indian writings are to be found in Strabo's account of the *shramanas*. Like Megasthenes he stresses their links with kings who turned to them in order to clarify the reasons behind events that were taking place (this ties in with Indian accounts).

Strabo tells of a special group of *shramanas* well known as soothsayers and conjurers, who wandered about from village to village, from town to town, begging as they went (these details can be seen to refer to wandering ascetics among the Ajivikas, who were most popular soothsayers).

Another account of Strabo's that appears to be linked with the *shramanas* is his description of the *pramnai* (most likely another version of the name *shramanas*). Strabo writes that the *pramnai* were represented as quite different from the Brahmins, as a special type of philosophers with a propensity for disputation and refutation. These philosophers used to mock the Brahmins, who were engaged in their study of the phenomena of Nature and astronomy, as haughty and unreasonable beings. These words convey with remarkable precision the atmosphere that reigned at the time when reform or so-called *shramana* schools were appearing on the scene, critical of the

Brahmans and their doctrine and engaged in diverse disputes on many problems concerning the existence of the world and man. *Shramanas* or "heretics" did indeed set themselves apart from the Brahmans, subjecting them to ridicule and disputing their theory concerning the exclusiveness of the Brahmans.

The *shramanas* attacked the haughty behaviour of the Brahmans, their allegedly unique right to instruct the whole of society and guide all men to the path of truth. Buddhist texts often refer to these claims of the Brahmans as ill-founded, misleading, false.

In the works of the classical writers there is a statement, most likely stemming from Megasthenes, to the effect that among the *shramanas* there existed groups of ascetics who rejected clothing (this information may well point to a link with the Jainas of the Digambara sect who walked about naked).

Megasthenes aptly picked out certain features of ideological development in India of this period: the existence of two basic trends—the orthodox trend and the reform (*shramana*) teaching opposed to the former, which however itself incorporated a variety of sects. Evidently, at the time when the Seleucid ambassador was living in India Brahmanism still enjoyed considerable influence, while the *shramana* sects, who opposed it, had not yet come to be regarded as something to be taken seriously; indeed not one of the reform trends had as yet come to be viewed as something serious or influential and thus merit particular attention on the part of foreigners. It should, of course, also be remembered that the fragments of Megasthenes' writings which have come down to us provide a far from comprehensive account; he may well have overlooked many important things about the religious life in India of the early Mauryan period.